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4 April –
17 April 2008
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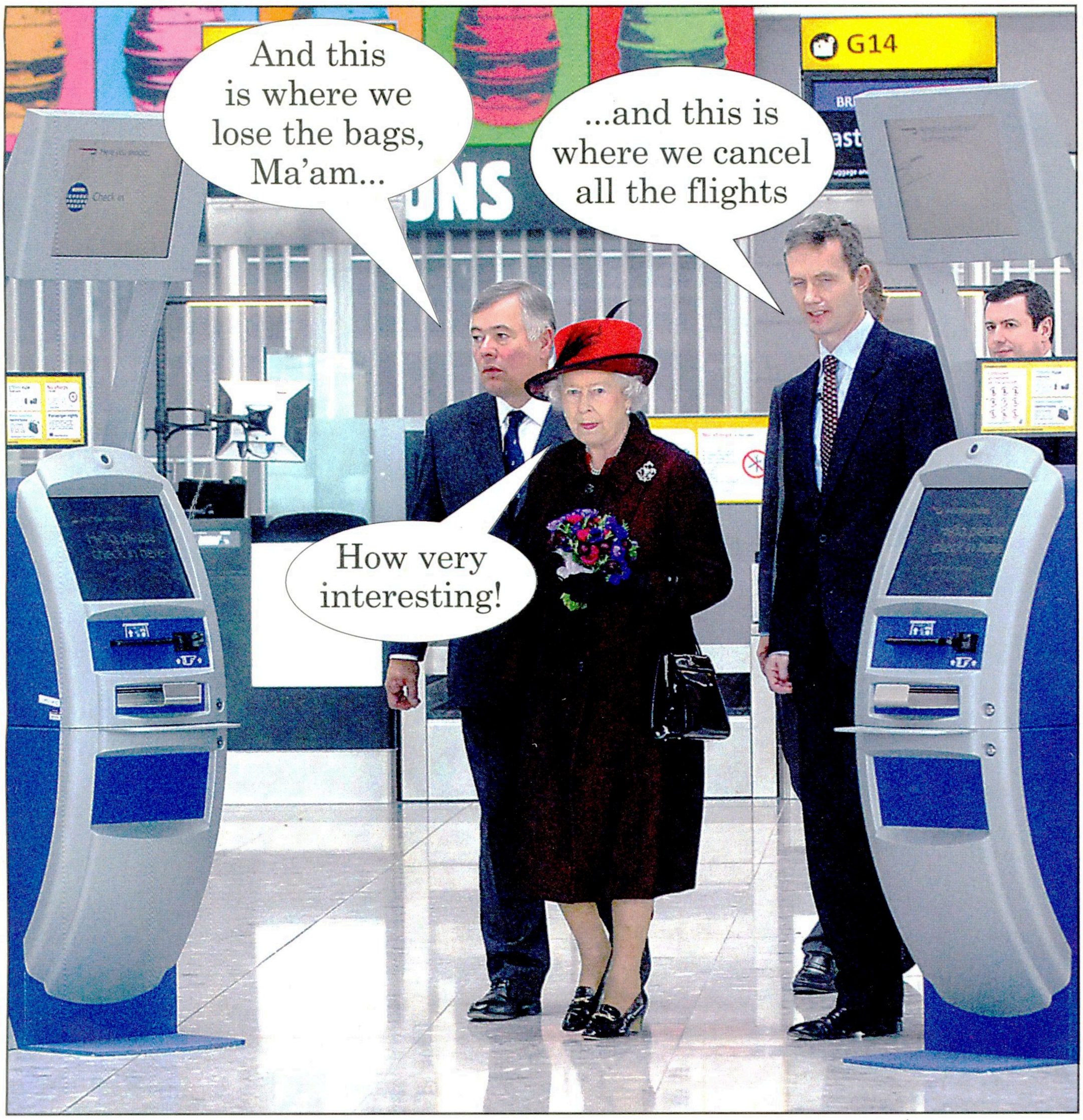
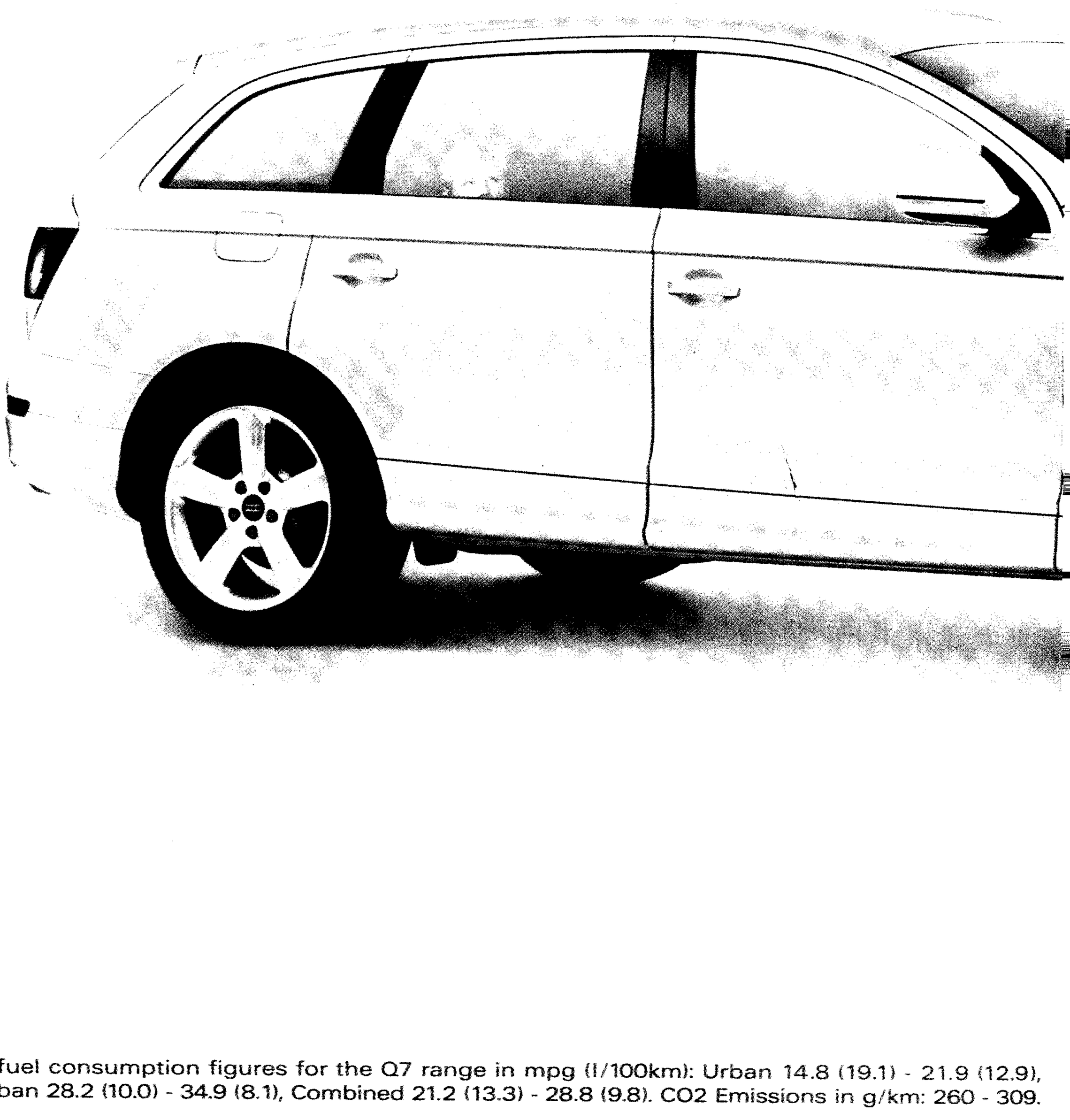
QUEEN OPENS HEATHROW'S T5



Because no-one's first question after an accident is 'how's the car?'



Official fuel consumption figures for the Q7 range in mpg (l/100km): Urban 14.8 (19.1) - 21.9 (12.9), Extra Urban 28.2 (10.0) - 34.9 (8.1), Combined 21.2 (13.3) - 28.8 (9.8). CO2 Emissions in g/km: 260 - 309.

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Terminal veracity

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THE Supreme Leader's press conference with Nicolas Sarkozy at Arsenal Football Club was a media disaster thanks to jobsworthian paranoia by Downing Street spin doctors and Arsenal goons.

The whole point of holding the event at the Emirates stadium, press-wise, was to get some images of Broon and Sarko playing football with some local children. Imagine how Blair would have played it – kicking the ball into the net and raising a fist of triumph.

But Downing Street minders unaccountably decided that only one pool reporter (a dutiful blunt nib from the Press Association) was allowed down on the pitch – it seems they didn't want naughty Fleet Street scribes shouting questions about Brown getting lost at Windsor Castle the night before.

When Sarkozy and Brown did finally kick a ball (for about one second) most members of the large press contingent missed the great event because they were stuck in a VIP suite a couple of hundred yards away. They were not even able to see it through the windows because a vicious little martinet called Terry Sedgwick was marching around the room, insisting the blinds stay in place over the windows.

Asked why this was necessary, Sedgwick at first tried the time-honoured excuse of "security". Then he refined this to: "Cos my guvnor says so."

Result: one pissed-off roomful of hacks who duly gave the event a thumbs-down the next day, barely mentioning Brown and Sarkozy's footballing moment.

● *More news from the Street of Shame, p6-7.*

SKY TV executives had a brilliant wheeze to liven up their coverage of the Sarkozys' arrival at Windsor Castle last Wednesday: they required embarrassed presenters to display a huge blown-up photo of the naked Carla and vox-pop the Windsor hordes on Mrs S's phwoar-factor.

Alas, Inspector Knacker spoiled the fun by insisting (on pain of arrest) that her boobs be covered over with gaffer tape for fear offending Her Majesty's French visitors.

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ABC

THE government's announcement of £225m for new playgrounds sparked a familiar row over Britain's disappearing playing fields. But how long will it be before any children actually get to play in the promised new spaces?

In June 2001, the then culture secretary Chris Smith announced that £200m would be spent on safe play facilities "that will benefit children throughout the land". By 2004, Labour bigwig Frank Dobson had produced a report entitled *Serious About Play*... but none of the money had been spent. Later that year, yet another culture secretary, Estelle Morris, told parliament that "the government will no longer ring fence pots of money for particular activities such as play. However, we still expect £200m for play to come from the lottery over time."

The Big Lottery Fund finally dished out the cash from its children's play initiative in, er, December 2007, six years after it was announced. Hurrah!

● *More HP Sauce, p8-9.*

IF London Underground staff in the RMT union carry out their threat to strike for 72 hours from 6 April, they will least do so in the knowledge that their pensions are safe.

There was no more vociferous a critic of the cocked-up London Underground public private partnership (PPP) than the RMT, whose members transferred to consortia Metronet and Tubelines. And after Metronet's collapse last year, they went on strike, saying: "Six years ago we told the government that PPP would be a disaster. Billions have been given to the privatisers... people are losing 10 percent of their pensions while Metronet is in administration."

But how are they now protecting the pensions they do have left? By investing in public private partnerships themselves of course!

Last week the PFI company Land Securities Trillium announced that it had raised £1.1bn for its new fund which will be sunk into health, education, transport and other PFI projects. Among the half dozen contributors to the pot is the Transport for London staff pension fund, whose members include the Metronet workers, five of whose trustees are nominated by unions including the RMT!

● *Virgin on the ridiculous, p12.*

OLYMPIC FLAME LATEST

"I have a fear of lying"

SOME of the younger, more London-based Tories have never been terribly good at geography and the bits of Britain that lay beyond the M25.

But shadow transport secretary Theresa Villiers excelled herself in a parliamentary written question in which she asked about the cost of widening the M6 motorway between junctions 11a and 19.

"Do plans for such widening include a stretch of four-laned motorway through the East Midlands?" she asked. Er, unlikely – not least because the junctions are nowhere near the East Midlands. What will Villiers' education spokesman colleague Michael Gove make of such a basic geographical howler?

"IT'S more than a new terminal. It's a new beginning," read BAA's adverts, spread across two broadsheet pages of the *Daily Telegraph* as Heathrow Terminal 5 opened for business.

Mercifully, the two passengers pictured sipping coffee while quietly watching the sun rise were completely oblivious to the mayhem and luggage that was presumably vanishing just out of shot.

Also apparently unaware of the chaos were the people at BA's Executive Club. On the day of opening an email to club members gushed: "At Terminal 5 everything has been streamlined and designed to make your journey through the terminal calm and relaxed. And this morning we saw all the planning fall into place." Yeah, right.

Meanwhile BA's own in-house magazine trumpeted the great day as "an experience to remember". It was certainly that.

● *More nauseating ads, p10.*

"MAKING Britain more family-friendly means saying yes, we will raise the tax on alcoholic drinks aimed at children and we'll give local communities the power to force the police to take away the licences of the bad retailers who sell it to them."

So said David Cameron at the Conservative party's spring forum on 15 March.

Three days later, his party's youth wing, Conservative Future, hosted a stall at the "People and Politics Day Europe" at Westminster Central Hall, an event "designed to complement citizenship education and political studies for Key Stages 4 and 5" – that is, aimed at 14 to 18 year olds. The ideal free gift to hand out to attendees? Conservative Future-branded bottle openers!

NUMBER CRUNCHING

£7m Amount spent by Metropolitan Police inquiry and coroner's inquest determining that Princess Diana was not murdered

£1.2m Amount raised for charity by Princess Diana memorial Concert last summer

Street Of Shame

THE attacks on protesters in Tibet by the Chinese authorities presented a problem for editors of Rupert Murdoch's newspapers. They could hardly ignore the story; on the other hand, they knew full well that the Dirty Digger has interests in Beijing and has tailored his prejudices accordingly.

Murdoch once described the Dalai Lama, whom the Chinese blame for the unrest, as "a very political old monk shuffling around in Gucci shoes". His son James Murdoch – now chairman and chief executive of News Corporation in Europe and Asia – has previously accused western hacks in China of supporting "destabilizing forces" that are "very, very dangerous for the Chinese government".

So, as condemnations of China's repression and calls for an Olympic boycott began to swell, it was time for damage limitation.

Former Olympian Sharron Davies explained to *Sun* readers that "a softly, softly approach of trying to encourage democracy gradually is a far better way". Former sports minister Lord Moynihan was called up for similar duties at the *Times*, urging a policy of "critical engagement" – an idea which Murdoch has floated in the past, with the emphasis more on engagement than criticism.

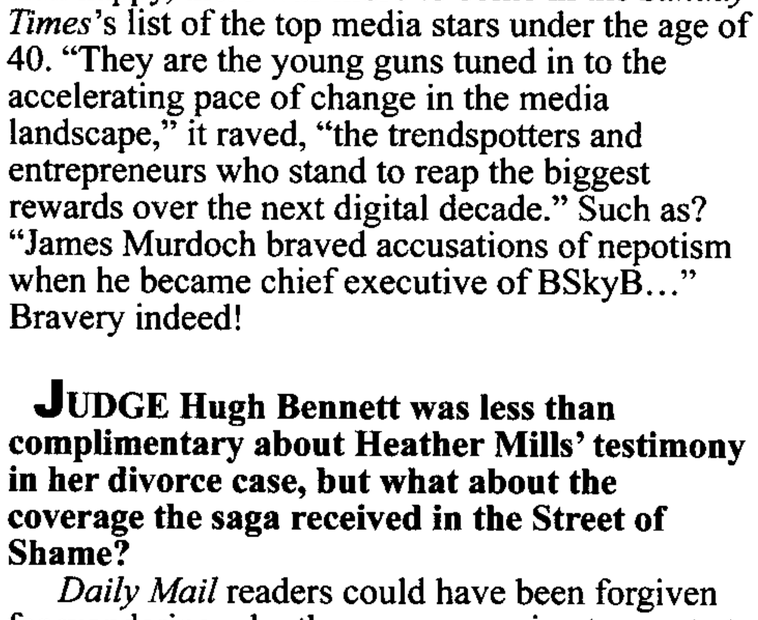
The *Sunday Times* was also keen to help, hailing "China Now, a huge, year-long festival backed by big corporate sponsors and the cultural diplomacy of the People's Republic and the British government." By happy coincidence, these corporate sponsors include its very own sister title, the *Times*.

If that wasn't enough to keep the Murdoch clan happy, there was more to come in the *Sunday Times*'s list of the top media stars under the age of 40. "They are the young guns tuned in to the accelerating pace of change in the media landscape," it raved, "the trendspotters and entrepreneurs who stand to reap the biggest rewards over the next digital decade." Such as? "James Murdoch braved accusations of nepotism when he became chief executive of BSkyB…" Bravery indeed!

JUDGE Hugh Bennett was less than complimentary about Heather Mills' testimony in her divorce case, but what about the coverage the saga received in the Street of Shame?

Daily Mail readers could have been forgiven for wondering why the case was going to court at all. After all, in June 2002 they were reliably informed that Heather Mills and Sir Paul McCartney had signed a pre-nuptial, agreeing "a £20m settlement should their marriage end in divorce… Sir Paul, 59, and 34-year-old Heather are believed to have signed a document before yesterday's [wedding] ceremony at Castle Leslie, County Monaghan. Both are said to be relaxed about the procedure, however, because they genuinely believe their love will last forever."

That *Mail* story was written by its then showbiz editor Victoria Newton – since defected to the *Sun* where as executive editor she has overseen much of its coverage of the divorce and revelled in the judge's description of Mills as a fantasist. She even wrote a column in November in which she boasted: "I've made claims Heather didn't like in the past – yet every one has been true." In the same column, Newton called Mills a "liar" because her father Mark had denied her claim that he violently abused her when she was growing up. And where did this abuse claim first receive a public airing? In the *Sun*'s serialisation of Mills' autobiography, *Out on a Limb*.



HOW SPORTS JOURNALISM WORKS

"John Terry is set to be handed the England captaincy against France tomorrow night." – Matt Law, *Daily Express*, 25 March.

"John Terry will regain the England captaincy for tomorrow's game against France." – Danny Fullbrook, *Daily Star*, 25 March.

"Fabio Capello handed Rio Ferdinand the England captaincy for tonight's friendly against France and delivered a stark warning to ex-skipper John Terry." – Matt Law, *Daily Express*, 26 March.

"Rio Ferdinand was last night named England captain at the same time John Terry was given a stark warning." – Danny Fullbrook, *Daily Star*, 26 March.

DESPITE having serialised Stephen Robinson's biography of Bill Deedes, *Daily Telegraph* editor Will Lewis has now decreed that the book shouldn't be mentioned in the paper.

Lewis only bought the serial rights to prevent other newspapers from running extracts which might embarrass him and his weirdo proprietors, the Barclay brothers. But once rival papers got over their excitement at Dear Bill's friendship with young reporter Victoria Combe, they spotted Deedes's description of the Barclays and their henchmen as a "stinking mob" – and duly repeated it.

Lewis was so furious he spiked the *Telegraph*'s own review of the book, a fairly anodyne piece by Lynn Barber, only to have to unspike it when news of his censorship leaked out. He also pulled a harmless little diary story about the book's launch. The launch party was conspicuously boycotted by Lewis and the rest of the "stinking mob".

Another of the mob's flaccid organs, the *Spectator*, commissioned a review of the book from Sir Peregrine Worsthorne, who mentioned Deedes's comments about the new regime. By the time his review appeared, however, *Spectator* editor Matthew d'Ancona had deleted all mention of the Barclays and their management stooges, rewriting the piece to imply that it was his fellow hacks whom Deedes despised.

D'Arsehola has long been famous for his yellow streak (last year he spiked Sarah Bradford's critical review of Tina Brown's Diana book because he was terrified of annoying Tina), but even by his standards this was seat-wettingly craven. He has now received the following letter from Worsthorne, a copy of which has also reached Lord Gnome:

"Dear Mr d'Ancona, Well done. When next Rupert Murdoch is looking for the ideally pliant editor – for *The Times*, perhaps – he need look no further than at your distinguished self. The way you distorted my Bill Deedes review – making him curse his colleagues rather than the Barclay brothers – was a prime example of your unprincipled servility. Many of the hacks at the book's launching party were equally impressed and joined me in hoping that you get all that you deserve. Yours sincerely, Sir Peregrine Worsthorne."

"I'm not allowed to display cigarettes"

NEVER mind Brown and Blair: has anyone ever disowned his predecessor quite as shamelessly as *Financial Times* editor Lionel Barber?

His interview in last Sunday's *Observer* was the latest piece orchestrated by the *FT*'s public relations wallahs to promote Barber by blaming all the paper's problems on the previous editor, Andrew Gowers.

"I don't want to talk about the past," Barber told *Observer* hack James Robinson, before going on to do just that. "If you look at what we've done you can see we've addressed the weaknesses that we suffered from." Such as? "We have a new news-editing team. We write stories that are believable. They don't collapse in the morning…"

What the *FT* can't and mustn't do, he added, "is say we've got to be accessible. That's a euphemism for dumbing-down". By an odd coincidence, in June 2005 Gowers told the self-same interviewer that he wanted to make the *FT* "more rapidly absorbable and accessible".

Barber also boasted that his rising circulation had confounded the so-called experts who were "writing off newspapers, saying newspapers are 'dead trees'." By an even odder coincidence, when Gowers was replaced by Barber as *FT* editor he said that his next job would "not involve ink printed on dead trees".

"HOW could anyone get their kicks like this?" demanded the *Mirror* over the news that police had "vowed to nail the YouTube sicko who whipped two children into a violent frenzy" in order to film them fighting.

"Police have contacted YouTube's California HQ to try to trace the computer from which it was uploaded. YouTube pledged to help and said: 'Our rules prohibit content like this'," the paper reported. "Following a complaint, the footage was taken down yesterday after five days online."

From YouTube maybe… but fans of punching 11-year olds in the face need not despair. Edited highlights of the video – including a sequence where one child stamps on the other's head – were available online the following morning on the *Mirror*'s website, complete with *mirror.co.uk* branding to ensure no one could lift them and pass them off as their own.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"SHOULD THESE SNACKS BE BINNED? Bag of Walkers Salt & Vinegar Crisps. Calories – 181. Carbohydrate – 17.3g. Fat – 11.4g. YES says Dr Stephen Monaghan, director of public health – it will help us try to control and prevent conditions such as diabetes and heart disease."

– Mirror, 26 March, p.11

"TASTY GIVEAWAY: Walk away with a six-pack of delicious Walkers Crisps for FREE with tomorrow's snack-tastic *Daily Mirror*."

– Mirror, 26 March, p.28

QUOTES OF THE WEEK

"The opening of T5 will mark the beginning of a new era of civilised aviation… It will be the first to deliver every bag to arriving passengers no later than half an hour after their plane reaches the gate… Every system in the building is now being tested and tested, and the signs are good. Just a handful of bags have gone missing in trials… The signs are that London's business elite, who never tire of issuing dire warnings that the cost of the chaos at Heathrow threatens London's continued success as the new centre of the financial world, will have to find something else to complain about."

– *Sunday Times*, 11 June 2007.

"SIR – Heathrow Terminal 5 opens to the public today: a triumph of modern engineering. With five levels, the size of 10 football pitches, it is the largest freestanding building in Britain… This project not only demonstrates the vital role that engineering and technology play in supporting our society, but it will also inspire a whole new generation to pursue careers in engineering."

– *Letter to the* Telegraph, *signed by the heads of 23 professional bodies involved in the construction of Terminal 5, published hours before multiple system failure caused chaos and the cancellation of dozens of flights.*

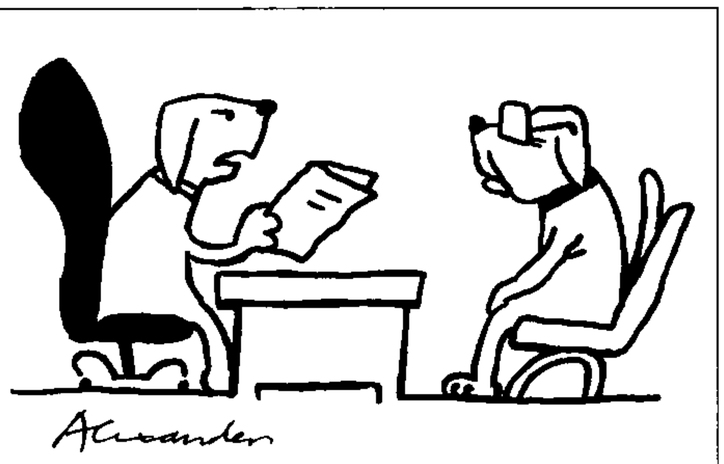
"I am delighted to be here at Heathrow to join these special celebrations and formally to declare Terminal 5 ready for business. Looking around this bright and airy space with its clean efficient layout, I am sure that many millions of travellers will have reason to be appreciative."

– *HM The Queen*, 14 March.

JOIN THE DEBATE!

"'We can't get anything right,' chorused the callers to radio phone-in shows. But they say that every time anything goes wrong… This defeatism is ludicrous… Could we lay off the British self-deprecation please?" – Editorial, *Daily Telegraph*, 29 March.

"Show me the person who was surprised that Heathrow's Terminal 5 opened amid chaos, and I'll show you a twerp – or perhaps a British Airways or BAA executive. Given that the rest of the airport is a disaster, why should this new terminal have been any different? And… it is not just this airline, or this airport, that is up the creek." – Simon Heffer, *Daily Telegraph*, 29 March.



"The reason you have to learn these new tricks, Wilson, is because the old tricks are not compatible with Windows Vista"

THE *Guardian*'s Saturday magazine, *Weekend*, made room for this important letter, praising a "brilliant" interview by Ian Katz with Tony Blair's old chief of staff Jonathan Powell: "I've been getting *Weekend* for ages, but this was definitely the best thing you've run," said the "reader", one J Keeble of West Sussex.

No doubt publication of the letter had nothing to do with the fact that the editor of the Saturday *Guardian* is, er, Ian Katz – and the man most desperate to succeed Alan Rusbridger as editor of the *Guardian*.

"REVEALED: Blair's offer to meet masked IRA leaders," screamed the *Guardian* headline. "Exclusive. Series of secret meetings and deals only now disclosed."

This was, of course, yet another front-page splash designed to promote the *Grauniad*'s serialisation of Jonathan Powell's new book about Tony Blair and Northern Ireland. But it owed more to hype than history.

In fact, as the text made clear, Blair never met the IRA Army council, as Gerry Adams wouldn't wear it. And it was Powell himself who made up the bit about masks, in a *Guardian* interview 10 years after the event. Asked how the meetings would have been conducted, had they ever happened, he said of the IRA leaders: "I suppose they could have worn masks."

WHICH hack left her car unlocked outside the house of the allegedly abducted schoolgirl Shannon Matthews in Dewsbury, on possibly the roughest estate in Yorkshire?

Fellow-hacks watched in amazement as a yoof jumped into the vehicle and tore down the street past a posse of local CID, before executing a handbrake turn and disappearing in a puff of blue tyre smoke.

The embarrassed Knackers launched a full-scale pursuit, even scrambling a police helicopter, only to find the car embedded in a lamp post. The miscreant had fled with the hackette's handbag, phone and credit cards.

Presumably the victim was an out-of-town hack who didn't know much about local crime habits? Er, no. It was Kate O'Hara – the *Yorkshire Post*'s crime correspondent.

EVERY year the *Jewish Chronicle* marks the festival of Purim with a "Purim spiel" – a spoof front-page story, a sort of Judaic April Fool.

This year's spiel claimed that Chelsea boss Roman Abramovich, having "fallen out of love with football", planned to invest at least £100m in the United Synagogue and transform it into a "world-class religious organisation which will be able to take on the best in Europe, notably the Catholic Church". He would use the bait of higher salaries to recruit "world-class rabbis from the continent and the USA"; meanwhile the synagogue in St John's Wood would be demolished and a new HQ built at Stamford Bridge. "The Star of David would then stand alongside the Chelsea lion at the gates of the stadium…"

An obvious hoax? Not obvious enough for the *Daily Mail*'s Ephraim Hardcastle, aka Peter McKay – who believed every word of it and duly led his column with the startling news.

ANOTHER banging scoop for Gordon Smart, the *Sun*'s Bizarre columnist. Last Wednesday he revealed that "sexually suggestive" routines by the gorgeous pouting Pussycat Dolls at a concert in Kuala Lumpur had earned the concert promoters a fine of 10,000 Ringgits (£1,436) from prudish Malaysian officials.

What better excuse to print photos of the Dolls' nipples bursting out of their skimpy outfits? As Smart drooled: "I've always admired any pictures of hot girl group Pussycat Dolls that happen to land on my desk. But these are even more FINE than usual…" Fine – geddit?!

Only one problem: the Kuala Lumpur gig actually took place in July 2006, and the 10,000 Ringgit fine – like the raunchy photos – was widely publicised at the time. The pictures must have been dropped from an awfully tall height if it's taken them almost two years to land in Gordon's throbbing lap.

HUMBUG SPECIAL

"MRS SARKOZY has had the British media lying on their backs drooling, gurgling with delight and with a certain suspicious bulge in their collective trousers," observed a miffed Jackie Ashley in the *Guardian* on Monday.

Really? Would that include the trousers of Katharine Viner, who observed of France's first lady that "her ruffled hair fell like closing curtains over those ice-pick cheekbones and cat's eyes… She whispered: at once husky and childlike, like the bits Jane Birkin speaks on the breathy 60s number *Je t'aime ... moi non plus*," in the, er, *Guardian*?

But then the paper can't seem to make its mind up about la Bruni. On the one hand, women's editor Kira Cochrane was complaining that "flicking through the coverage of Bruni's first day, it was easy to forget that there had been other people at the events… Every picture seemed to focus on Bruni, until, if you squinted a bit, you would swear that there were armies of her marching across the papers"; and media columnist Peter Wilby decried the "Eurosceptic *Mail*, the *Telegraph*, the *Express*, the *Sun* and the *Times*" for being too "smitten" with the "PR package on offer".

On the other hand, their colleagues could not resist putting large pictures and florid appreciations of la Bruni on the front page two days running, as well as clearing two spreads and, er, seven pages of the features section. With Aida Edemariam and Linda Grant covering such vital issues as Bruni's love life ("She has been linked to Donald Trump, Kevin Costner and the former French Socialist prime minister, Laurent Fabius") and looks ("Just look at the man-trapping stare that Carla Bruni has triumphantly brought to Britain. Show us how it's done, Carla"), it was left to the paper's news section to concentrate on the really important stuff: "As in all fashion, the accessories were integral. Black leather gloves and belt pulled tight at the waist betrayed her catwalk roots. The black pumps were chic and practical… Carla did make one wardrobe mistake. She opted for a classic black, framed handbag."

Ooh là là!

GOSH DARLING… I LOVE YOUR ACCESSORY!!!
THANK YOU. IT'S A LITTLE FRENCH NUMBER… REALLY GETS ME NOTICED!
FASHION TOSH
THANK YOU, …CARLA BRUNI!

ARMS industry leaders were furious when "ethical" Gordon Brown scrapped the Ministry of Defence's Defence Export Services Organisation (DESO), which had involved the government in so many Middle East arms deals loaded with dubious commissions, without consulting them.

But they needn't have worried. The job of pushing British arms sales abroad has now simply been shifted to UK Trade & Investment, part of the Department for Business and Enterprise, and a body with the completely different-sounding name of, er, DASO – the Defence and Security Organisation.

The government is trying to find a head for this new outfit, and the job description from recruitment consultants Russell Reynolds Associates shows that for arms dealers it will be business as usual. DESO staff will be kept together as a unit in their new DASO home, and the arms industry will still have its own privileged one-stop shop.

IT LOOKS as if the government is expecting to lose the high court challenge to its controversial decision in 2006 to stop the corruption investigation into the arms giant BAE Systems.

The raft of constitutional reforms announced last week by Justice Secretary Jack Straw removed the attorney-general's powers to intervene in decisions to prosecute in individual cases… except when the government decides that national security might be at stake. "The power [to stop a prosecution] would also extend to investigations being conducted by the Serious Fraud Office," said Straw's "constitutional renewal" paper.

This is exactly what happened in 2006 when Tony Blair told his then attorney-general, Lord Goldsmith, to shut down the SFO's investigation into BAE and its Saudi arms deals.

This February the decision went to judicial review. It emerged in court that the Saudi ruling clan's Prince Bandar (who was previously alleged to have received £1bn in secret payments from BAE) had apparently threatened Mr Blair that the Saudis would stop passing on terrorist intelligence to Britain if the investigation wasn't called off. But, it was claimed, the prime minister, in his lengthy letter to Goldsmith about the case, was more concerned about the loss to Britain of lucrative arms contracts.

The judicial review brought by anti-corruption campaigners is being heard by Lord Justice Moses and Mr Justice Sullivan. The pair have already expressed surprise that the government yielded so easily to "unlawful" threats and have questioned whether ministers were entitled to ignore international anti-corruption treaties by merely "waving the flag of national security".

Their judgment is due shortly; but either way it seems Straw's constitutional "reforms" will ensure it doesn't impact on the government's future behaviour.

ANOTHER toxic legacy of the Blair years that wasn't going to be disturbed by Jack Straw's "constitutional renewal" announcement last week was the ascendancy of special advisers and heavily politicised civil servants within Whitehall.

Despite recognising that "accountability of government is fundamental to the health of our democracy", the justice secretary ignored all advice that the most unaccountable apparatchiks be reined in.

Following repeated examples of special advisers and supposedly independent civil servants such as, er, Alastair Campbell over-stepping the mark over the past decade (during which special adviser numbers more than doubled), the public administration select committee, former cabinet secretary Lord (Richard) Wilson, civil service unions and the civil service commissioners had all recommended that the commissioners should be able unilaterally to investigate breaches of the special advisers' and civil service codes.

Straw – himself once a special adviser to Barbara Castle – was unmoved. Instead investigations will occur only with the "agreement of the government, on the advice of the head of the civil service", ie not at all. This will come as a relief to Straw's boss Gordon Brown, who has five special advisers of his own, among them his principal adviser Stephen Carter (see *Man in the Eye*), amid the hand-picked civil servants in his office. Best avoid any embarrassing questions there.

WHERE do Labour ministerial advisers go when their bosses are all washed up? Into "thought leadership", or PR as it used to be called.

Thus one huddle of Labour-linked hangers-on has decamped to the Ledbury Group, the new lobbying outfit formed last November by Nick Bent, former Culture Secretary Tessa Jowell's one-time special adviser.

Even the Ledbury name is achingly New Labour, recalling the Notting Hill street a ciabatta's throw from the house Peter Mandelson had to flog the first time he was forced to resign in disgrace. So it's no surprise to learn that Ledbury has appointed Benjamin Wegg-Prosser, Mandy's former special adviser at the Department of Trade, to help with "political relations".

It has also hired Chris McShane, until last year a media adviser to Tony Blair himself. He joins Ed Mitchell, a former adviser to Margaret Beckett at the Foreign Office; and part-time Ledbury consultant Anna Turley, a parliamentary assistant to former Labour cabinet office minister Hilary Armstrong.

So given Ledbury's New Labour credentials and its talk of "reputation" and "corporate social responsibility", who are its actual clients? They include Nestlé, whose reputation for corporate anti-social irresponsibility selling baby milk powder in the third world or junk food in the first world is second to none; HBOS bank; and Asda – part of the giant WalMart group which fought so hard to keep the unions out of its UK depots.

GLOBAL power giant E.On is taking no chances in its bid to build a giant coal-fired electricity plant in Kent.

Though Kingsnorth will emit vast amounts of carbon (unless speculative "carbon capture" technology actually works), the government, nudged by a rant from Business Secretary John Hutton, is getting behind the plan. Helpfully E.On gave its second donation to the Labour party at the end of last year.

To handle awkward public relations, E.On has hired the lobbying firm of Edelman, which in turn employs Jules Peck. He chairs David Cameron's "quality of life" commission that is supposedly bringing "green" thinking to the revamped Tory party.

CALLED TO ORDURE

LABOUR MP Andrew Dismore keeps opposing private bills in the Commons. In this he may fancy himself the heir to the late Eric Forth, the bloody-minded Tory right-winger who felt there were already far too many laws in the land.

Dismore's objections to bills don't seem to have much to do with libertarianism, however. They are driven more by his instincts as a personal injury solicitor: to stop any reform of Britain's compensation culture (which provides such rich pickings for m'learned friends).

In 2004 Dismore spoke for three hours in a Commons debate, helping to kill an attempt by Canterbury's Julian Brazier to reduce lawsuits against volunteering groups. Now Hendon's Dismore has pretty much repeated his trick by speaking at length against a bill which would have reduced the liability of animal owners.

The Animals Act 1971 (Amendment) Bill was brought in on a Friday morning by Tory backbencher Stephen Crabb. Worthy plodder Crabb explained that a riding centre in his constituency had seen its insurance costs rise by 65 percent since a House of Lords judgment in 2003. That judgment increased liability for owners of animals such as horses, ponies and cows. It is no longer good enough for riding schools to take every reasonable precaution against mishap. They can now get whacked for compensation even if an accident is not their fault.

Crabb was backed by a broad range of groups and MPs, ranging from the Lib Dems to shire Tories, Labour backbenchers to the Ramblers Association and noted that the equine sector employs 250,000 people with another five million people taking an "active" interest in riding.

Dismore's first contribution was to suggest that the bill might affect children "savaged by a big dog". Crabb replied that there is separate legislation to cover dangerous dogs.

John Robertson (Lab, Glasgow NW) described how one of his constituency party volunteers had a finger bitten off while shoving a letter through a post box. Dismore recounted that in 1982 he was bitten by a Jack Russell while electioneering. "During the 2001 general election a Cairn terrier nipped my finger," he added. "On a third occasion I put my finger through a letterbox and something – I have no idea what – got me. My finger was bleeding when it came out." His conclusion seemed to be that no compensation laws about anything should be diluted while MPs' fingers were at risk.

Dismore was now launched into increasingly lurid disaster scenarios, imagining a family's Sunday afternoon walk in the countryside being wrecked by a rampaging horse which cripples a child. "Who would bear the risk?" he shrieked. Wiggin wondered if there was not sometimes room for something called "parental responsibility". Not in modern Britain, chum!

When Shaw started to support the bill, Dismore leapt in to ask a highly emotive question about people being left paraplegic or with brain damage by freak incidents involving animals. "Is the minister prepared to see cases involving people who become dependent on the state rather than an insurance company?" cried Dismore melodramatically. Dependent on the state? What, just like an MP?

At 11.54am we got to the nub of the matter. Mr Dismore: "I should remind the House that I was a personal injury lawyer for 20 years before I was a Member of Parliament. I have maintained my practising certificate and am a consultant with my law firm."

He argued that animal owners should take out insurance. "It is a luxury to own a dog," he said. "Before I was elected I had a dog. Unfortunately she died."

Tory MP Justine Greening wondered if "its death was due to boredom". She had a point. Dismore spoke for more than two hours, at the end of which the House was so stunned into tedium that Dismore was able to call a vote and there were insufficient MPs awake or on the premises to pass the bill. Result: another worthy attempt to restrain compensation madness fails. Another victory for Andrew Dismore.

'Gavel Basher'

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

THE UK isn't the only EU country to take huge amounts of public cash from the European Investment Bank (EIB) to subsidise domestic private finance initiative schemes (see last *Eye*).

Our PFI-loving chancellor Alistair Darling is of course a governor of the EIB, while Tim Stone, the PFI expert at the beancounter KPMG (which advises the UK government on PFI deals) sits as an "expert director" at the bank. But Stone is not alone.

Counterbalance, a coalition of campaigners who monitor the EIB, alerted *Private Eye* to the bank's two other "expert directors" who, like Stone, also work for firms that do extensive business with the bank.

One is Frenchman Pierre Richard, chairman of Franco-Belgian bank Dexia. The EIB has made dozens of loans to Dexia, typically to set up a Dexia-run fund which finances various business ventures. Thus did the EIB lend Dexia €25m in 2006 so Dexia could invest in European public-private partnership (PPP) schemes.

The EIB's third "expert director" is Rainer Masera, former chairman of the Italian bank Sanpaolo IMI, which has also received many loans from the Luxembourg-based EIB. Masera now works for Lehman Brothers – currently involved in at least 10 EIB projects.

EU-phemisms

Let's gang up on the Germans

For the flypast, four fighter jets blazed through the sky accompanied by the RAF Innsworth band.

The Citizen (Gloucester)

MAN IN THE EYE

STEPHEN CARTER

IN JANUARY the jaded world of the lobby hacks was energised by rumours of new blood. Gordon Brown had realised his henchmen weren't up to the job of running Downing Street and he was going to save his government by replacing them with a stupendous team of business managers led by Stephen Carter.

In an article that was close to a love letter, the *Spectator* explained that Carter was "one of the more capable men wandering around Whitehall... an outsider with an extraordinary CV". He was "a big hitter", said the *Times*. "One of the brightest men in advertising" agreed the *Telegraph*.

Only those who wondered how Labour had allowed so many big hitters to waste so much public money were sceptical.

Chris Dillow, author of *New Labour and the Folly of Managerialism*, said: "Good managers used to be men who knew their business. No one thought that if you could run a grocery business, you could run a pharmaceutical business. Not now. The Government believes in the cult of the omnipotent manager who builds his fortune by leaping from sector to sector without ever staying long enough to work out what to do."

Carter's career confirms his point. He began at the J Walter Thompson advertising agency, then moved to the struggling cable TV company, NTL. What could an advertising man know about turning round a television business? Next to nothing, as you would expect. NTL duly went bust in 2002 with debts of £12bn.

Carter jumped before it sank with a pay off of £1.7m and a £600,000 bonus. Broke shareholders sued. In documents lodged at the Southern District Court of New York, they alleged that a fellow executive asked him: "How can you... persuade investors to believe that NTL is going to be okay when you know it isn't?" To which Carter allegedly replied: "What I tell them is nine-tenths bullshit and one-tenth selected facts."

Carter denied impropriety and the case was settled without an admission of guilt. But surely no one could deny he had failed.

New Labour could, however; and it put a man who had presided over the collapse of one network in charge of Ofcom, which regulates other networks.

His record at NTL and lack of regulatory experience didn't count against him. On the contrary, Tessa Jowell, the then culture secretary, said she was delighted to find a candidate with the "relevant commercial and management experience". Patricia Hewitt, then trade secretary, added that Carter's appointment as chief executive meant that Ofcom was "ready to take on the challenges ahead of a dynamic communications market".

Bewildered media correspondents found the biggest challenge Carter overcame was upping the bullshit quotient. "It's straight out of Dilbert," sighed the man from the London *Evening Standard* after hearing Carter and his colleagues blether about "workstream prioritisation", "specificity in the communications landscape" and "enforcement mechanisms attached to the outputs not the inputs".

The management-speak hid the dismal truth that New Labour believed in "light-touch regulation" – letting the market take care of itself – so there wasn't much for him to do. Light touch regulation was a heavy burden on the taxpayer, however. Carter charged £440,000 for his services and employed 28 staff earning more than £100k in Ofcom's lush offices.

In 2006 he was off again to become chief executive of City PR firm Brunswick. That he had never had a career in PR was no handicap. He was a stellar manager who could bring in new business. Among the old clients in his care was Lord Browne, the chairman of BP. Carter arrived and Browne's PR took such a hammering he was forced to resign in disgrace.

Two years on and the bouncing executive flew through the air again and landed in Downing Street. Apart from arranging "breakout sessions" in cabinet meetings, his contributions to date consist of ordering Labour to stop mocking David Cameron for being an Etonian toff – even though it is the attack the Tories fear most – and to instruct the government to pretend Britain is on the right track as the crisis in the banking system pulverises its reputation.

His lack of experience of parliamentary politics and economic crisis management does not inhibit him. Why should it? Carter is a thoroughly modern manager. No one would think him a "big hitter" with an "extraordinary CV" if he learned to hold his tongue until he knew what he was talking about.

'Ratbiter'

Down on the Farm

IT IS advisable, if you are a farmer, to do anything to avoid appearing in court before District Judge Brian Loosley, who usually presides in and around Oxford. On the other hand, if you're not a countryman, you may be lucky enough to discover why Judge Loosley has a reputation for soft-hearted leniency.

When, for instance, Trevor Ashworth carelessly ran his dustcart over a Worcester College student, Tsz Fok, crushing him to death, Loosley fined him a mere £500, banning him briefly from driving. When Paul Willis's bus ran over and killed a St Catherine's student, cyclist Emilie Harris, Judge Loosley punished him for a "serious error of judgement" with only another £500 fine, plus eight points on his licence on the grounds that more would have deprived the bus driver of his livelihood. Even deliberate cruelty to animals can prompt Loosley to leniency, as in the case of James Hendry who, after being found guilty of repeatedly kicking and biting his dog, was fined just £150, prompting complaints by the RSPCA.

But no sooner does a countryman appear before Loosley, it seems, than he becomes a different man. Reported here before was the case of Lancelot Beale, the Wiltshire farmer who appeared before Loosley on a string of charges, mostly relating to a day when Beale returned home to find that his sheep flock had been savaged by dogs. After the intervention of a Defra vet, Ralph Drouin, Beale was accused of cruelty for not having destroyed the sheep which survived the attack.

Judge Loosley had no hesitation in sentencing him to three months in prison and disqualifying him from keeping animals for 10 years, thus impacting rather significantly on his livelihood. He included a further sentence for Beale's "cavalier" failure to dispose properly of the carcases of several dead sheep. When Beale appealed, another judge immediately released him on bail after two days in the cells. The case dragged on for five years, through 55 different hearings, costing taxpayers £250,000 and ended with Loosley's custodial sentences being replaced with a conditional discharge.

Similarly unfortunate was Jeffrey Heritage, after police invaded his smallholding to find several shotguns not under lock and key. Heritage, who had held a shotgun certificate for more than 30 years, claimed he took his guns out of their cabinets before a shoot and had left them briefly unattended while giving his brother a lift.

Loosley said he was unable to believe anything the farmer said and, deploying his favourite word, said that Heritage's "cavalier" action had put the public at risk. Apparently, a burglar might have stolen the guns and passed them on to more violent criminals. Heritage was given four months in prison – said by Thames Valley Police's head of firearms to be the first occasion anyone had been jailed for this offence.

Clare Hobsley appeared before Loosley on charges of cruelty to two of her horses. An RSPCA "unannounced inspection" found them to be suffering from the equine disease laminitis. Loosley found Hobsley guilty, after a marathon 25-day hearing costing hundreds of thousands of pounds, and banned her from keeping horses. When she appealed, another judge immediately released her from a "two-year nightmare" by finding that the condition of the two animals didn't demonstrate cruelty and that, in light of Mrs Hobsley's lifelong dedication to her horses, Loosley's ban should be lifted. It seems it is not only Defra and the RSPCA who don't care much for farmers.

'Muckspreader'

"... Red sky in the morning, potential extreme weather event"

ITV

The Fixer (ITV1)

LAST WEEK Michael Grade was awarded nearly £1m in bonuses for his more-spoken-of-than-observed relaunch of ITV. Grade's windfall comes on the back of a strong 2007 in advertising, fuelled by Lewis Hamilton's Grand Prix success and the Rugby World Cup, helped along by Channel 4's post *Celebrity Big Bother* (sic) disintegration.

But this year there will be no sporting beanos to fill the coffers; and so, with little other option, ITV is betting the house on primetime drama. The problem is, neither Grade nor pretty much anyone in British television has the first clue what the audience wants to watch these days apart from talent shows, reality and soaps. Which is why we get muddled, madcap offerings like **The Fixer**.

Jon Mercer is an ex-Special Forces hard nut who's been banged up for killing his own aunt and uncle because they abused his sister. He is played by Andrew Buchan, a perfectly capable actor but a deadringer for Droopy the Dog, which somehow tempers his menace. Anyway, Mercer is granted early release by a shady government Svengali with a Marlboro growl called Lenny (Peter Mullan). The *quid pro quo* is that for his freedom, and for the right to see his sister and her children, Mercer must now whack pretty much anyone Lenny demands.

From the evidence on display, he'd be quite capable of doing this on his tod, which means the addition of an ensemble cast can only be to satisfy the demographics – Rose (Tamsin Outhwaite) is a blonde honeytrap who provides the intel, while Calum (Jody Latham) is a lippy footpad included for comic relief. Like *The A-Team*, our black ops crusaders operate "above the law", taking out the crims whom conventional policing cannot.

It's really not as bad as it sounds. And yet, like almost every single one of ITV's new mid-week prime-time dramas (*The Palace*, *Echo Beach* and *Honest*), four shows in to a six-part run and *The Fixer* is tanking in the ratings. But if you're interested in why so many British TV dramas remain so resolutely cock-eyed, it remains riveting viewing.

The Fixer is made by the current untouchables of UK television, Kudos, the production house behind *Spooks*, *Hustle* and *Life on Mars*. Fair enough: Grade and his lackeys have seen who's been scoring goals for the BBC, and have decided to poach their best player.

Kudos has conquered British television by taking the mainstays of American serial drama – high concepts, slick camerawork and interchangeable ensemble casts – and repackaging them for British audiences. What the formula doesn't allow for is any let up in pace, because an average UK drama has a six-episode run (in America it's generally 13 or 22) and probably has only the first of those episodes in which to peg the audience to their sofas. It's here that *The Fixer* really comes unstuck, because it's trying desperately *not* to announce everything at once – trust the viewer to work some things out, let the exposition take care of itself. There's a bit more to Mercer than just a stoney-eyed assassin. We've seen him reading books about the genome, so we know that. Likewise Rose and Lenny – good actors, a whiff of a backstory, some teasing ambiguities.

All in all it feels like the writers are battling against the format. That's because they are. *The Fixer* was written by Ben Richards and Neil Cross, both of whom started out as wide-eyed young novelists, both of whom moved in to screenwriting, via *Spooks* of course, once they realised there's no money in books. Richards, who as it happens is married to a producer at Kudos, had an intermission from the Kudos gravy-train when he wrote the BBC2 political drama *Party Animals*. It had obvious cult potential but was messed around in the schedules and subsequently axed. That, palpably, was his passion project. Yet here he is yoked to Kudos's standard terms and conditions trying to jimmy in references to Schrödinger's Cat to a formulaic crime drama.

The question is, what does ITV want: intelligent drama or hare-brained schlock? There's an audience out there for both but *The Fixer* appears to be satisfying neither.

'The Zapper'

DUMB BRITAIN

96.4 BRMB, Birmingham

Elliott Webb: Who wrote Charlie And The Chocolate Factory?

Caller: Was it HG Wells?

The Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: Who wrote Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats, which was made into a musical by Andrew Lloyd Webber?

Contestant: Er... Old Possum.

Robinson: Which author wrote the novels Girls In Love, Girls Under Pressure and Girls Out Late?

Contestant: Ernest Hemingway.

Mastermind, BBC2

John Humphrys: Who is the daughter of Vera Brittain who was one of the co-founders of the Social Democratic Party?

Contestant: David Owen.

THE NEOPHILIACS

"Carla [Sarkozy] was the only topic of conversation... Were we looking at a new Jackie O?" – *Daily Mail.*

"Is Carla the new Diana?" – *Daily Telegraph.*

"The weather is the new Diana." – *Daily Express* editor Peter Hill, quoted in the *Guardian*.

"Kate – The New Diana?" – Sky TV documentary.

"Are Tibetans the new Jews?" – *Jerusalem Post.*

"Clothes are the new politics." – *Times*.

"Spring is the new summer." – BA advertising slogan.

AD NAUSEAM

THE most anticipated advert of the year, if that's not an oxymoron, is the new slot for Cadbury's. And by the time you read this, it will be everywhere.

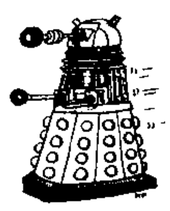
Once again the ad is a piece of wilful obscurantism (replace a drumming gorilla with a Wacky Races-style night-time truck race around an airport), and once again it features an 80s soundtrack (replace Phil Collins's "In the Air Tonight" with Queen's "Don't Stop Me Now"). Most importantly, however, it has nothing whatever to do with chocolate. It could be advertising anything.

The agency responsible is Fallon, currently London's hottest shop thanks to recent work for Sony (multi-coloured bouncing balls/rabbits/tower blocks), Skoda (small cars as giant cakes) and now Cadbury's. Ad men used to talk about the elusive word-of-mouth factor. Getting punters to talk about ads down the pub was seen as priceless free media, but the standard procedure was first get them to watch it. Now that TV's reach is dwindling, however, Fallon has twigged that that paradigm has reversed. It is now, first, get people to talk about it, and then it doesn't really matter if they watch it, what's in it or whether it has any bearing on the product it's promoting.

In this environment, PR is everything. That's why the hallmark of Fallon's ads for Sony Bravia, Skoda and Cadbury's has been the bloggers invited to shoots, the corresponding online video snippets, the breathless news stories and the quote-me stats the agency has pumped out on each occasion and that have been gleefully regurgitated by newspapers that should know better – the volume of Play-Doh it took to make the Sony bunnies, the litres of paint required to drench a tower-block, and now the three weeks it took to pimp the trucks for this latest magnum opus (Paint jobs! Engine rebuilds! Wheel hubs and refitting interiors! Oh my!)

The giveaway, however, comes from Cadbury's marketing director, Phil Rumbol: "We recognised that 'Gorilla' had an enigmatic, almost random element to it that audiences had responded to, and had generated masses of debate online. That was something we wanted to make even more explicit in this next film." Welcome to the "explicit enigma", another oxymoron that would appear to be the future of advertising.

BIRTSPEAK 2.0



"In line with BBC Three's multi-platform strategy, *Spooks: Code 9* will be accompanied by an online extension produced by Kudos and leading alternate reality game studio Six to Start. The series will include a live alternate reality experience that provides a multi-dimensional setting for the show and allows viewers to explore and contribute to this changed world."

– BBC press release

LIBEL – DESMOND DECKED

JUST FANCY THAT 1

"[Express Newspapers are] being sued by the McCann family for all the rubbish stories they have carried since Madeleine's disappearance… many of which suggested – without any justification – that the parents might have killed their own child."
– *Private Eye*, 7 March.

"Talk of Kate and Gerry McCann suing Richard Desmond's *Daily Express* and other newspapers is, for the moment, wide of the mark."
– *Times*, 13 March.

"McCanns' libel award".
– *Times*, 20 March.

IN THE run-up to its Madeleine McCann libel settlement and front-page apologies to Kate and Gerry McCann, the Express group wielded its airbrush with Stalinist efficiency.

At the insistence of proprietor Richard "Dirty" Desmond, Express titles had printed rubbish about Madeleine and her family week in, week out since the little girl's disappearance last May. Yet anyone searching the *Express* website for any of the 100 "grossly defamatory articles…. downright lies and fabrications" – or indeed any information at all about Madeleine, a front-page fixture in the *Depress* for much of 2007 – is now greeted with the message "o results found".

Not that this has stopped readers trying to find articles. A list of "popular searches" on the site a week after the £550,000 payout revealed the following: "madeleine; Madeleine McCann; mccann; Princess Diana; crossword, Kate Middleton; maddie, Madeline."

Someone at the paper did try to oblige on 27 March, with the brief appearance of an online news story: "The parents of Madeleine McCann are taking part in an ITV documentary to mark the first anniversary of their daughter's disappearance." Within minutes, a mischief-maker had clicked the site's "Have Your Say" option and published the ironic response: "Are we still allowed to imply they did it? 'Cos everyone knows they did."

Half an hour later and the story had vanished with all the others.

HAVING paid out to the Madeleine McCann Fund, Richard "Dirty" Desmond is on a mission to get his money back ASAP by cutting editorial costs.

Daily Star columnist Dominik Diamond and his heavyweight colleague Vanessa Feltz have already had their marching orders. And while sacking a feature-writer by email last week, editrix Dawn Neesom explained to her victim that "the *Daily Star* won't be able to use any casual features reporters at all. This is entirely due to budget cuts. In the current financial market we have to make considerable savings across all of our newspaper titles."

Popular Goss girl Leigh Purves has left and the two remaining hacks on the column have been offered a few quid each to cover her position. Editorial managers are demanding copies of casual rotas and lists of staff who still work four 10-hour shifts a week instead of five.

But one department has escaped the freeze. The day before Dirty Des's front-page apologies to the McCanns, the *Times*'s legal supplement carried a quarter-page advert for "an experienced legal adviser to join the in-house editorial legal team based at Express Newspapers…" Duties include providing pre-publication advice "and dealing with post-publication complaints" for the group's national titles. An irresistible job for anyone who enjoys shutting stable doors after a horse has bolted.

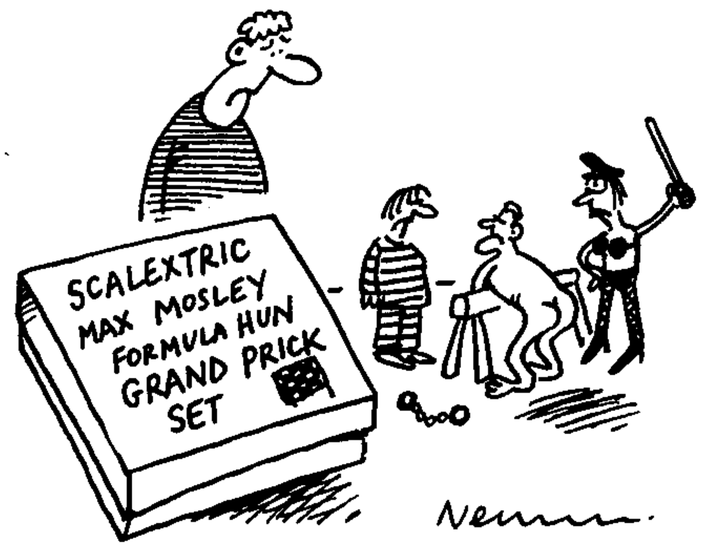
EVERY cloud has a silver lining, and the ever bullish Express chairman has been trumpeting his front page McCann apologies as the best free advertising his titles have ever enjoyed.

However, a suggestion that they could have been used as a promotion – FREE APOLOGY FOR EVERY READER – was, alas, rejected by his editors.

JUST FANCY THAT 2

"The *Daily Star* and *Daily Star Sunday* have made a wholehearted apology to Kate and Gerry McCann for stories suggesting the couple were responsible for, or may be responsible for, the death of their daughter Madeleine and for covering it up. We now recognise that such a suggestion is absolutely untrue and that Kate and Gerry are completely innocent of any involvement in their daughter's disappearance."
– *Daily Star, front page, 19 March*

"SHANNON MUM IS QUIZZED AGAIN…"
– *Daily Star, front page, 19 March*



EVERY LITTLE YELPS

ANYONE who feels less than enthusiastic about Tesco had better keep their thoughts to themselves in future: the supermarket giant is now taking aggressive legal action against people who accuse it of being, er, aggressive.

The company has started proceedings for criminal libel against a newspaper columnist and a former MP in Thailand, where it has almost 500 stores – twice the number it had only two years ago. It is demanding an incredible one billion baht ($32.1m) in damages from Jit Siratranont, a former member of the legislative assembly who now runs the Thai chamber of commerce. Kamol Kamoltrakul, an academic and journalist, is being sued for a modest 100 million baht ($3.2m).

Siratranont's offence was to make a speech warning that the firm's rapid expansion in Thailand (where it trades under the name Tesco Lotus) could cause "serious conflict" unless Tesco made more effort to conciliate small shopkeepers. "The large-scale expansion of the big retailers must be exercised with great care – not too aggressively and too rapidly – to reduce the potential tension," he said. "There is also the need for the small retail traders to adjust to changes. Tesco Lotus must take all of this into account." Kamoltrakul made much the same point in an article for a Bangkok newspaper.

Both men admit that they made one factual error, in suggesting that 37 percent of Tesco's global revenue now came from Thailand. The company has seized on this to justify its ferocious legal retaliation, saying that although it accepts that "people are entitled to their opinions" it cannot tolerate "false and misleading statements". But the defendants point out that the percentage error doesn't detract from the main thrust of their argument, about growing concern at the Tescoisation of Thailand. Nor can it possibly justify the absurd damages Tesco is demanding.

If Tesco executives recall the McLibel trial, they might realise that huge corporations which launch massive lawsuits against individual malcontents can end up with a pyrrhic victory, even if they win. The South-East Asian Press Association has already accused Tesco of trying to "intimidate independent media, harass legitimate criticism and stifle discussions and debate over legitimate public concerns". The trial will undoubtedly become an international *cause célèbre* for free-speech campaigners, and the ensuing publicity will do far more damage to Tesco's reputation both in Thailand and abroad than anything said by Messrs Siratranont and Kamoltrakul. Neither defendant can afford multi-million damages, so if they lose the case they'll be consigned to one of Thailand's Dickensian debtors' prisons – thus making Tesco look even more odious and vindictive.

AL JAZEERA NEWS

THE woes of Al Jazeera English continue, with staff stranded out in the Qatari desert now reduced to sending pleading emails to colleagues in London and Kuala Lumpur.

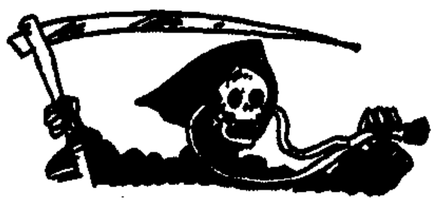
"None of our freelancers has been paid for commissioned work since December," pointed out a despairing senior editor in a mass mailing to colleagues at the end of March.

Last week saw the resignation of managing editor Steve Clark, recruited from Sky News ahead of the channel's launch. His wife Jo Burgin had already departed as head of planning and is currently awaiting the outcome of a claim for sex, race and religious discrimination, and Clark's departure brings to an end an entertaining tit-for-tat war with deputy managing director Ibrahim Helal to see who could veto the most of the other's story ideas. For the moment managing director Nigel Parsons, whose sidelining by his superiors the *Eye* noted in January (issue 1202), remains – though he is now so surplus to requirements that AJ staff have begun a campaign on Facebook to have Maurice, a stray black-and-white cat who lives in the Doha newsroom, appointed in his stead on the grounds that he is at least occasionally "actually in the building".

Meanwhile other enterprising staff members are finding other ways to keep the riyals rolling in. One member of the Al Jazeera Human Resources Department was fired recently for the theft of staff members' personal details and medical records, which it is thought he planned to auction off to the highest bidder.

SUPERMODELS
KERBER
MUMMY THIS WEBSITE ENCOURAGES EATING DISORDERS AND COSMETIC SURGERY IN YOUNG GIRLS !!!
REALLY?
EXCELLENT! …SO I DON'T HAVE TO WASTE MONEY ON THOSE EXPENSIVE CELEBRITY MAGAZINES ANY MORE !!!
Miss bimbo
Miss bimbo

MEDICINE BALLS



Patient McChoice

"*THE Good Hospital Guide. From Cardio to Cancer – where to get the best treatment.*" So proclaimed the front page of the *Independent* on 20 March to coincide with Labour's 1 April pledge that patients requiring non-emergency treatment can travel to any NHS hospital in England, or indeed any private one that has an NHS contract.

Alas, the *Indy*'s extensive guide lists just ten "best" hospitals, all in London. For "eyes", it recommends Moorfields hospital, whose latest Healthcare Commission rating for quality of services was "weak"; and for "bones and joints" it goes for the Royal National Orthopaedic hospital in Stanmore (HC rating: fare). The Royal Marsden hospital for cancer does at least have an "excellent" rating, but "cancer is one of the specialties excluded from the extended patient choice agenda".

The *Indy*'s sparse recommendations are entirely based on reputation; but patient choice is pointless without outcome data that provides meaningful comparisons between different centres. How likely is it that the treatment will improve my quality of life? How likely is it that it will kill or maim me? Clearly statistical adjustments need to be made for those specialist hospitals that attempt harder operations on sicker patients; but experience with adult heart surgery has shown that this can be done fairly, that surgeons don't cherry pick easy operations and that the sharing of mortality data with patients has coincided with an improvement in survival rates.

The government and NHS have been painfully slow to roll this information out for other specialties, but BUPA has been collecting patient reported outcome measures (PROMS) since 1999. Patients complete a standardized questionnaire (EQ-5D available at www.euroqol.org) and are followed up at three and six months after surgery. Prospective patients can then be given a fair indication of how likely a treatment is to improve quality of life rather than just provide a pathology specimen and a six-inch scar.

The NHS is only now dabbling with PROMs, limiting them to hernias, varicose veins and hip and knee replacements for 2008-9. This is a tacit acceptance that information gathering for BUPA (largely middle class, articulate and motivated patients) may be easier than following up NHS patients. A 70 percent response rate will require a huge amount of effort and my guess is that it will be dumped on GPs, who will refuse to do it.

In the meantime, patient choice will continue to be cosmetic and insubstantial. Hospitals can take on the most inappropriate corporate sponsors (some, such as Guy's, already have a McDonald's on site) and use their expertise to advertise services (but not directly discredit the services of their rivals). They can also enlist the help of celebrities who've been patients to publicly endorse the treatment they've received. Those who don't already jump the queue for a private room will be able to enhance their treatment with the promise of a free plug.

Most patients will choose to stick with their nearest hospitals; but choice has the potential to improve quality and safety in the NHS by putting reliable, independent, unbiased performance data in the public domain and making all hospitals up their game. In contrast, adverts, sponsorship and celebrity endorsement will just be a breeding ground for yet more bias and spin.

M.D.

(No patient complaints for over 10 years – but then I don't see many patients)

SIGNAL FAILURES

Virgin on the ridiculous

THE government still won't admit publicly that it was taken to the cleaners when Virgin's west-coast mainline franchise was renegotiated in December 2006, but evidence is emerging that it is now trying to cut Richard "Beardie" Branson down to size. In the Alice in Wonderland world of privatised rail, however, it is doing so via a plan for longer trains that beggars belief.

Back in 2006, when transport minister Tom Harris claimed he'd struck "a better-value deal for the taxpayer", the *Eye* argued that it was a better deal for Virgin (*Eye* 1175). Hey presto, subsidy per passenger kilometre doubled and Beardie pocketed £24m profit in a year.

Since the nightmare of the Virgin-Railtrack modernisation plan (*Eyes passim*) which sent people into cars and on to planes, trains have become somewhat more reliable and business is growing on the west-coast line between Euston and Manchester, Glasgow, etc. Thus, even before a Pendolino was wrecked in last year's Cumbria derailment, it was obvious extra carriages would have to be leased soon. Virgin offered to do so in return for an extension to its franchise, but the offer was rejected by the Department for Transport on cost grounds. Last week, Harris even said Virgin had tried to blackmail the government.

Still, even the bungling civil servants who run the rail network (and repeatedly understate future rail growth) now acknowledge that more Pendolino carriages are needed. But to clip Beardie's wings, Virgin won't be allowed anywhere near them: the government intends to bring in a "shadow" train operator to run the longer trains.

Bizarrely, this means that until Virgin's west-coast franchise ends on 31 March 2012, the chosen company – probably one of the existing passenger or freight train operators – will earn its fees not by carrying passengers but by commissioning new rolling stock and preparing the west coast infrastructure for four new trains and 70 extra carriages to start service when the next franchise begins.

The fees will also cover the cost of replicating skills Virgin already has, such as training drivers on Pendolinos (Virgin being the only operator currently that runs Pendolinos). Some of the rolling stock could theoretically enter service sooner, but that would depend on the government softening its stance and negotiating another "agreement" with Virgin.

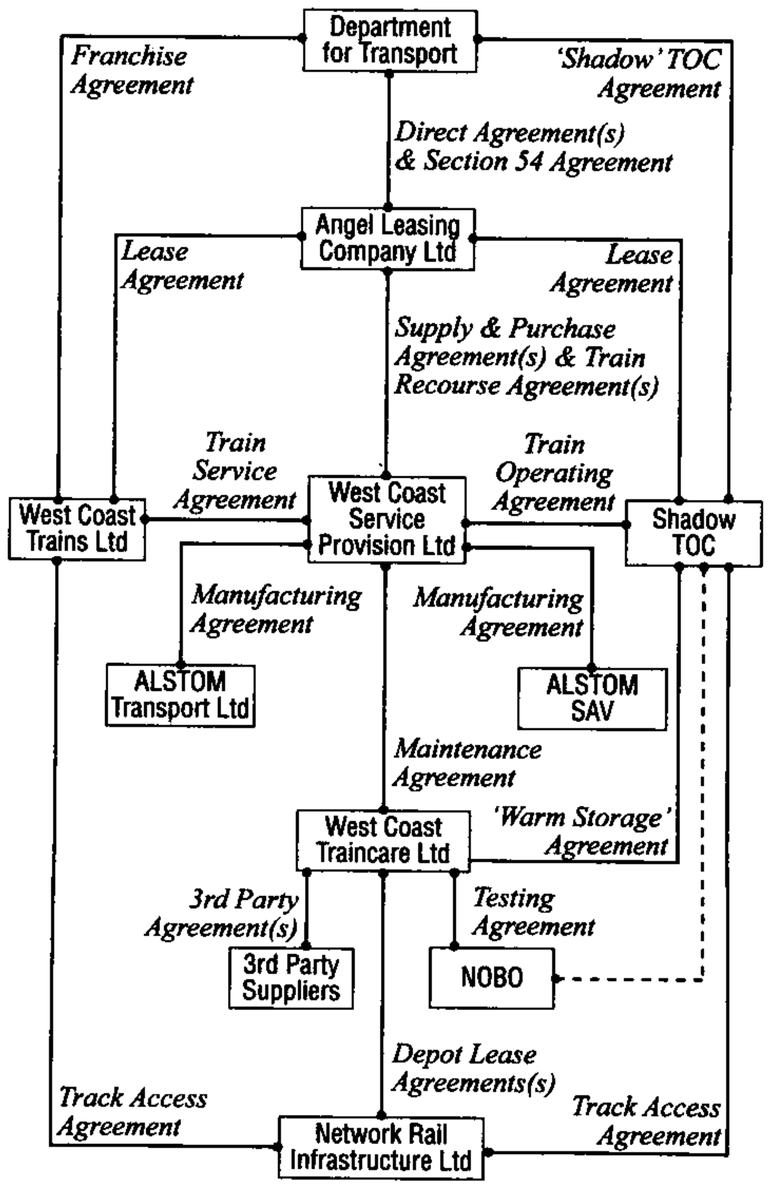
As if the "shadow operation" weren't surreal enough, the new operator may have to run the new trains empty around the mainline for up to 18 months to keep them "warm" until April 2012. Thus Virgin's passengers, packed like sardines, would see costly new kit running empty and killing time purely for contractual reasons.

The rail industry desperately needs simplification. Passengers on the west-coast mainline have already suffered a decade of disruption as the industry struggled to implement modest modernisation. Introducing extra trains of an existing design should be straightforward, but the industry is so complicated this simple task apparently requires even more complication.

Implicitly, adding another party to the industry's contractual spaghetti is cheaper than getting Virgin to do the job from the inside. Funny that, when Harris (in public at least) says Virgin provides good value.

And if you thought the current Pendolino "contract structure" was complex, look at what's in store until 2012 with the proposed shadow operating company:

Figure 2: Indicative Contract Structure: to 31 March 2012



'Dr B. Ching'

ECO WORRIER

Going for green

THE Sports Industry Awards are determined to keep up in these carbon neutral times, introducing an "Environmental Concern in Sport" category for this year's bash in London. But some shortlisted nominees for this green accolade suggest the judges may be in need of education.

One eye-catching candidate is Honda's Formula 1 team, for its planet-saving decision to, er, repaint its cars with pictures of the Earth and encourage people to donate to green charities.

The team's pin-up Jensen Button (previously known for his love of gas-guzzling super yachts) is fronting Honda's "green" PR. Unfortunately, despite the fact that F1 has cleverly ridden on the back of Team Honda's eco-branded (but not re-engineered) cars, the race series has yet to introduce most of the practical greener technology measures it trumpets.

Also up for a gong is Scottish & Southern Energy, for "powering the National Sailing Academy" – essentially by providing renewable energy to its building. Oops! Clearly the judging panel were unaware that Scottish & Southern is the firm recently rapped over the knuckles by the Advertising Standards Authority for a misleading green brochure on tree planting, which it was told to withdraw immediately.

Better luck perhaps with a third nominee, another well-known energy company, for its tie-up with Ipswich Town in becoming the first carbon-neutral football team. Alas not! The company in question is EON-UK, currently attacked from all sides for its decision to build a coal-fired power station, the UK's first for 24 years, at Kingsnorth in Kent, fuelling (*geddit?*) its reputation as one of Britain's largest polluters.

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

PORT IN A STORM

COLIN PORT, chief constable of Avon and Somerset police, is pleased to have struck a deal with Southwest One, a new "joint venture" between Somerset county council, Taunton Deane borough council and computer giant IBM, under which hundreds of council and police backroom staff are transferring to the new company to pool resources in the name of increased efficiency and cost-saving.

Not everyone is impressed, alas. Ian Liddell-Grainger, Conservative MP for Bridgwater, told the House of Commons last week of his concerns about Southwest One. "I believe that public money is being misappropriated. And I fear corruption," he said.

Liddell-Grainger is concerned about lack of democratic accountability. Eighty-one percent of Southwest One will be owned by IBM, with the taxpayers' interests being watched over only by two Lib Dem councillors. "Already Southwest One has taken over the employment of 800 staff formerly on the payroll of Somerset county council and Taunton Deane borough council. Interestingly, the payslips for those employees still come from the councils, but their long-term employment rights are now stunningly vague. They have been 'guaranteed' that their jobs are secure, but the small print of the guarantee – believe it or not – is not available for inspection, even if they knew what was going on.

"Southwest One is an outfit born in secrecy and reliant on secrecy. Trade unionists who ask responsible questions are branded traitors. Joe Stalin would have been proud of the company. Southwest One is destined to gobble up more than £400m of public money providing just two councils with services over the next 10 years."

The project would only work, the MP claimed, if many more local authorities were on board. But last year the government turned down Somerset county council's bid to take over five district councils and become a giant "unitary" authority. Liddell-Grainger described this as "a half-baked and stupid idea" which "was driven by one dangerous but very determined individual" – Somerset's chief executive Alan Jones. (Proud winner of the 2005 Rotten Boroughs Blue-Sky Thinking award!)

Liddell-Grainger is also concerned about a lack of transparency surrounding the process whereby IBM became the council's preferred partner, and wants to know why reports by consultants Maana on the project's business plans have not been made public. He finished his speech with the words: "I invite the minister to investigate how one non-elected chief executive, Alan Jones, forced through such a mad, corrupt, barking scheme. Even Joseph Stalin did not go beyond five-year plans."

To read Liddell-Grainger's speech in full, click the link to Hansard in the Rotten Boroughs section at www.private-eye.co.uk.

PS: Southwest One's project director is one Sue Barnes... aka Mrs chief constable Colin Port.

"Welcome to this public consultation..."

WIGHT MOVE

NEARLY a year after Newham council's chief executive Dave Burbage announced his "retirement", the borough has at last found a replacement.

Eye 1202 told of the shambles that ensued last autumn when headhunters Rockpools produced a candidate, Roger Tucker, who delighted elected mayor Sir Robin Wales because of his background in, er, international oil prospecting. Alas it was only after Mr Tucker got the job that anyone bothered to look properly at his CV. When it was discovered that he had worked for the dodgy Russian firm Yukos and for an Arab company in partnership with the Chinese in Sudan (the Sudanese regime finances genocide in Darfur by flogging oil to the Chinese) the job offer was withdrawn and Tucker was sent off with a pat on the bottom and a very large cheque.

The new man at Newham is none other than Joe "Vera" Duckworth, who moved from Westminster council to the Isle of Wight less than two years ago. Could this be the same Vera who, just five months ago, wrote on his blog: "The report of me applying for other jobs isn't true. I don't know why these rumours start or for what motivation, but why should I?" Why indeed? Nothing to do with the £200,000-a-year on offer at Newham, a 30 percent increase on his Wight wage, obviously.

At least the Isle of Wight has a good man ready to take over as acting chief exec. Step forward, er, Dave Burbage, the man who supposedly retired on leaving the top job at Newham, of all places, so suddenly last year.

PS: Back in Newham, acting chief executive Chris Wood, Burbage's former deputy, is in line for a handsome "retirement" package when Vera arrives. Perhaps he is already checking out bungalows on the Isle of Wight...

MACKEM LAUGH

EYE 1205 reported that Sunderland's district auditor has been called in to investigate the proposed sale of the freehold of three-quarters of an acre of land owned by Sunderland city council for £100,000 which, if it goes ahead, will net the council's deputy leader, Paul Watson, around £270,000 – because he holds the lease of a run-down social club on the site, which is valued as development land at £370,000.

We wondered what the hurry was, and whether the Labour council's share of the proceeds – just £100,000 – was good value for taxpayers. Documents have since emerged which throw more light on this murky affair. Although Watson apparently took no part in the cabinet decision in September 2007 to sell the freehold of the site on which the Ford and Hylton social club stands to developer Gladedale, the *Eye* has established that he had last year taken part in negotiations to sell the remainder of his lease to the Sunderland Housing Group, the housing association formed out of the city's former housing department, now known as Gentoo. A report to the board of SHG subsidiary, the Central Sunderland Housing company, dated 4 April 2007, states: "We have withdrawn from discussions with Paul Watson regarding the sale of the club on Fordfield Road as he has received a substantial offer from Broseley Homes." Broseley Homes is now known as Gladedale.

Curiously, the city's cabinet then agreed to sell the site's freehold for just £100,000 in June 2007 to the mysterious Maxam Property Ltd, a tiny company with a third of its shares owned by a "blind" British Virgin Islands company, which then just as mysteriously withdrew, leaving the way open for Gladedale, which is acquiring adjoining former SHG land and wants to build about 100 houses on it.

Just a week before the SHG report noting Cllr Watson's involvement in commercial negotiations with the housing group, on 27 March 2007 he had voted in a cabinet meeting in favour of changes to SHG's governance arrangements which allowed it to become a fully commercial private sector developer, rather than a local provider of "social" housing as envisaged at the time it obtained 36,000 council properties for just £6,200 each in 2002. So no possible conflict of interest there, then.

● ALL IS NOT QUIET on the Weston front. The locals in this sleepy Oxfordshire village are furious at proposals for a new "Eco" town on their doorstep. Up to 20,000 ticky-tacky boxes, schools, industrial units and a railway station could be built on the green belt farms between them and the M40 motorway. Protest meetings, led by tennis star Tim Henman's father Tony, are packed. Local farmer Neil Godwin represents Weston on the Green on Cherwell district council. He also is a large landowner in the very area which will make up the putative new town. Developers have taken an option on buying his land. Conflict anybody? Resignation anybody?

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER

GET OVER HERE NOW! WE'VE GOT TO MOBILISE A PROTEST GROUP AT ONCE!
MAX AND POPPY, GET DOWN HERE AS SOON AS YOU CAN! AND CALL ALL YOUR FRIENDS!
RIGHT, I'M CALLING THE LOCAL PAPER, THE LOCAL RADIO AND OUR MP
I'M CALLING THE COUNCIL PLANNING OFFICE, THE CONTRACTORS AND FRIENDS OF THE EARTH. IT'S A DISGRACE!
STOP THIS MAST MADNESS
THINK OF THE CHILDREN!
PHONE MAST INSTALLERS

JUST FANCY THAT!

Other formats

This leaflet is about changes to water and sewerage charges. It is available in a range of languages on our website at www.niwater.com/watercharges08. If you would like this information in a different language or format, please write to: Customer Relations Centre, PO Box 1021, Belfast, BT1 9DF. *[English version]*

This leaflet bes aboot altherations tae chairges fer watter an 'sewerage. Hit can bae gat i a wheen o'differ leids oan oor wabsteid aa www.niwater.com/watercharges08. Gif ye'd laike thae wittens i a differ leid ir format sen'a screed tae Customer Relations Centre, PO Box 1021, Bilfawst, BT1 9DF. *[Ulster Scots version]*

Northern Ireland Water

NOOKS and CORNERS

ENGLISH Heritage has at last woken up to what is going on in Liverpool: the accolade of being European Capital of Culture 2008 has been used as both a smokescreen and an excuse for an orgy of redevelopment, sanctioned by the LibDem-controlled city council *(Eyes passim).*

A re-survey of what remains of Liverpool's historic buildings will be undertaken by July and, for starters, two Georgian terraces in Dale Street have just been listed. However, the Liverpool Preservation Trust dismissed this as "shutting the stable door after the horse has bolted"; and UNESCO has been complaining for some time about the council's cavalier treatment of a World Heritage Site.

Not that listing necessarily helps. Liverpool already has 2,500 listed buildings, of which some 400 are in danger – ten of them are grade II* and appear on English Heritage's register of buildings "at risk". Last month, what remained of three listed mid-Georgian houses in Seel Street were demolished as they had become dangerous, although £226,000 of public money had been spent on repairs only two years ago. The houses were owned by a developer, Messrs Frenson, who wished to develop the site keeping the Georgian facades. Too late.

Another scandal concerns the former Lying-In Hospital on the corner of Hope Street and Myrtle Street known as Josephine Butler House. The Maghull Group Ltd hopes to demolish the (unlisted) 1860s building as part of a £100m development of flats, shops, car parking and a boutique hotel and, in February, began to demolish the façade before permission had been given. Oddly enough the Maghull Group was one of the sponsors of Liverpool council's yacht which was recently moored at Cannes in the South of France for the annual MIPIM event.

MIPIM (*Marché International de Professionals d'Immobilier*) – "The world's property market" – is a boozy junket for developers, their architects and clients. So Cllr Warren Bradley, leader of Liverpool city council, was there on the yacht, which he thinks is "the perfect setting for a range of hospitality and networking activities". How true.

Other "supporters" of Liverpool's yacht included Neptune Developments Ltd, one of the developers of the controversial blocks being built on Mann Island between Pier Head and the Albert Dock (*Eye* 1185); the Beetham Organisation, to whom the council sold land for the 40-storey Beetham West Tower; and Iliad Koukash Ltd, who had "theoretically broken the rules", according to the city's regeneration officer, when it smashed up the façade of No 6 Sir Thomas Street (destined to make way for another boutique hotel) just before it was to be inspected by English Heritage (*Eye* 1186).

How dare Cllr Paul Clein complain of a "cosy relationship" between Liverpool council officials and major developers in the city!

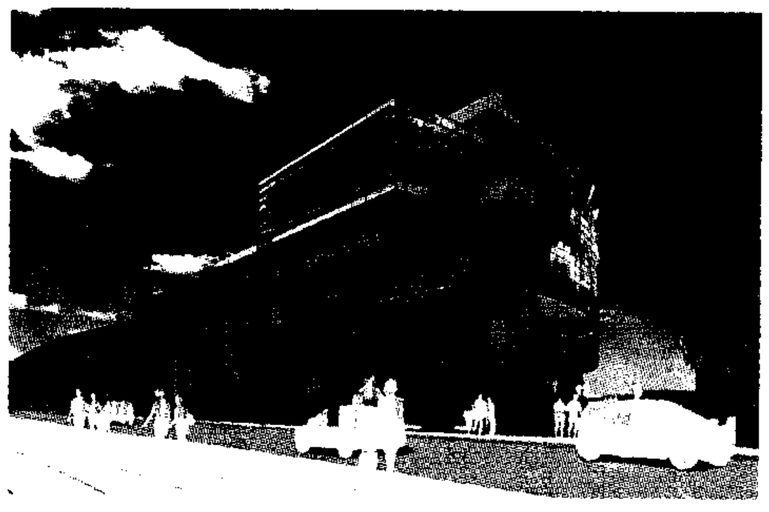
IF English Heritage is at last trying to do the right thing in Liverpool, the same cannot be said of its behaviour in Bath, from where comes news of an inexplicable betrayal.

Remember the scheme to build the Dyson School of Design Innovation designed by Wilkinson Eyre architects on the site of the Newark Works, the former premises of Stotherd & Pitt, "cranemakers to the world" (Eyes 1176 and 1195)? This was scuppered when it was realised that the 1850s building was an early work by Thomas Fuller who went on to design the parliament buildings in Ottawa and become chief architect to the Dominion of Canada.

Thanks, in particular, to pressure from the Canadians, the Newark Works were listed, though only at grade II, in 2006. After that, Wilkinson Eyre came up with a scheme retaining part of the listed building, and then it was all off because of problems with Bath Spa University over land ownership.

Now it is on again, despite opposition from the Environment Agency, which points out the South Quays site by the Avon is liable to flood, as well as from the Victorian Society and Bath Heritage Watchdog.

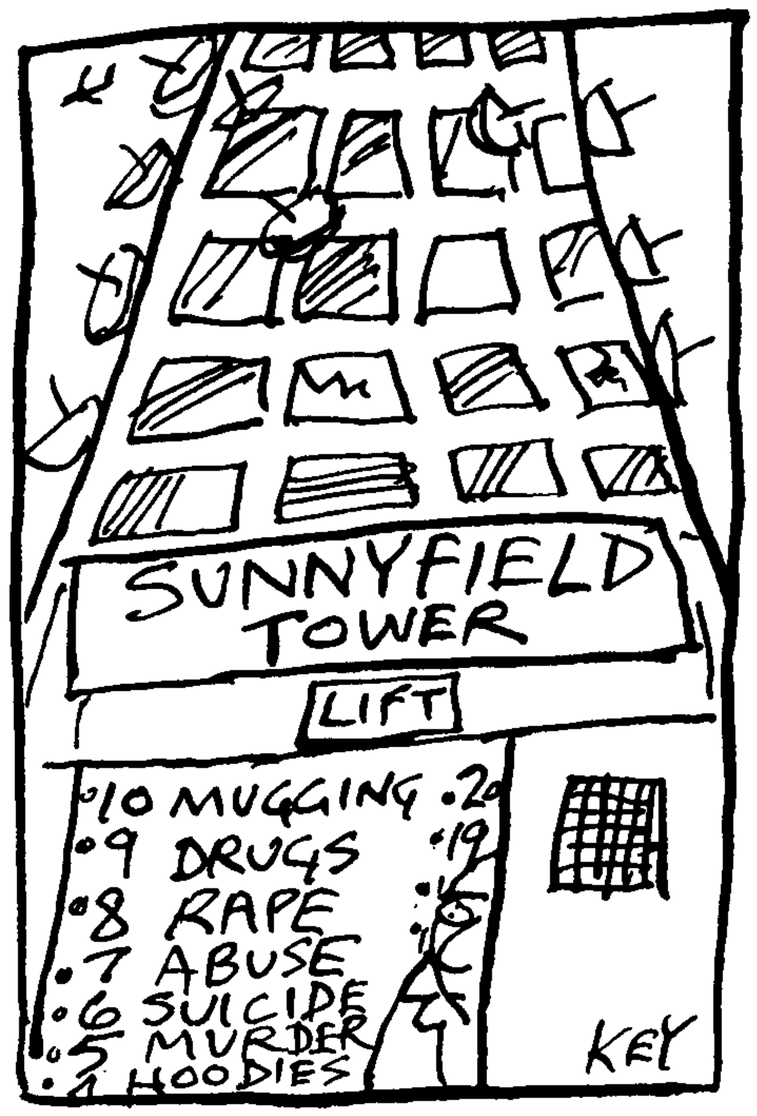
No wonder: the scheme involves demolishing most of the building and mutilating what is suffered to remain: that is, the principal façade. The stone Classical front will be rendered



ludicrous and illiterate by having great chunks cut out of its massive battered plinth to make an open arcade. Yet English Heritage, whose task it is to protect our historic environment, changed its mind and raised no objection to this barbarism.

Bath & North East Somerset Council has now approved the scheme. However, because of the Environment Agency's opposition, there may have to be a public inquiry. And there should be: the The Dyson scheme is dreadful. It is what you get when fashionable High Tec architects have to cope with a solid masonry building they neither understand nor respect – in this case leaving its fine facade isolated, meaningless and trivialised. Such, alas, is the "Constructive Conservation" English Heritage now seems desperate to be identified with.

'Piloti'



MUSIC & MUSICIANS

MONTHS ago this column complained about the Royal Opera House's cringe-making ad campaigns to persuade the public that it is hip and trendy. Now the House is courting further embarrassment with the announcement by its general director Tony Hall of a bright new initiative to attract what he calls "that buzzy, cool crowd" through his Bow Street doors.

It's the result of market research bought in, very expensively, from a chic outfit called Dunnhumby that normally works for companies like Tesco. And what Dunnhumby finally concluded after weeks of intensive probing at taxpayers' expense was – fanfares and drum-rolls – that opera doesn't attract too many young people. Doh!

So, inspired by the professional expertise of Messrs Dunn-nothing-much, the House is to develop its pursuit of youth with a September festival celebrating what Mr Hall calls "the coolest names in town". In truth, they're not names that immediately spring to mind as having anything to do with opera, but that's clearly beside the point. No doubt the buzzy, cool crowd will know who Blatant Theory (a radical performance group) and Scanner (a conceptual artist/musician) are. No doubt they'll turn out in droves for the ROH "club nights" at which these celebrated souls will appear. And having done so, they'll surely waste no time in signing up for the next buzzy, cool production of *La Donna del Lago* or the *Ring* Cycle.

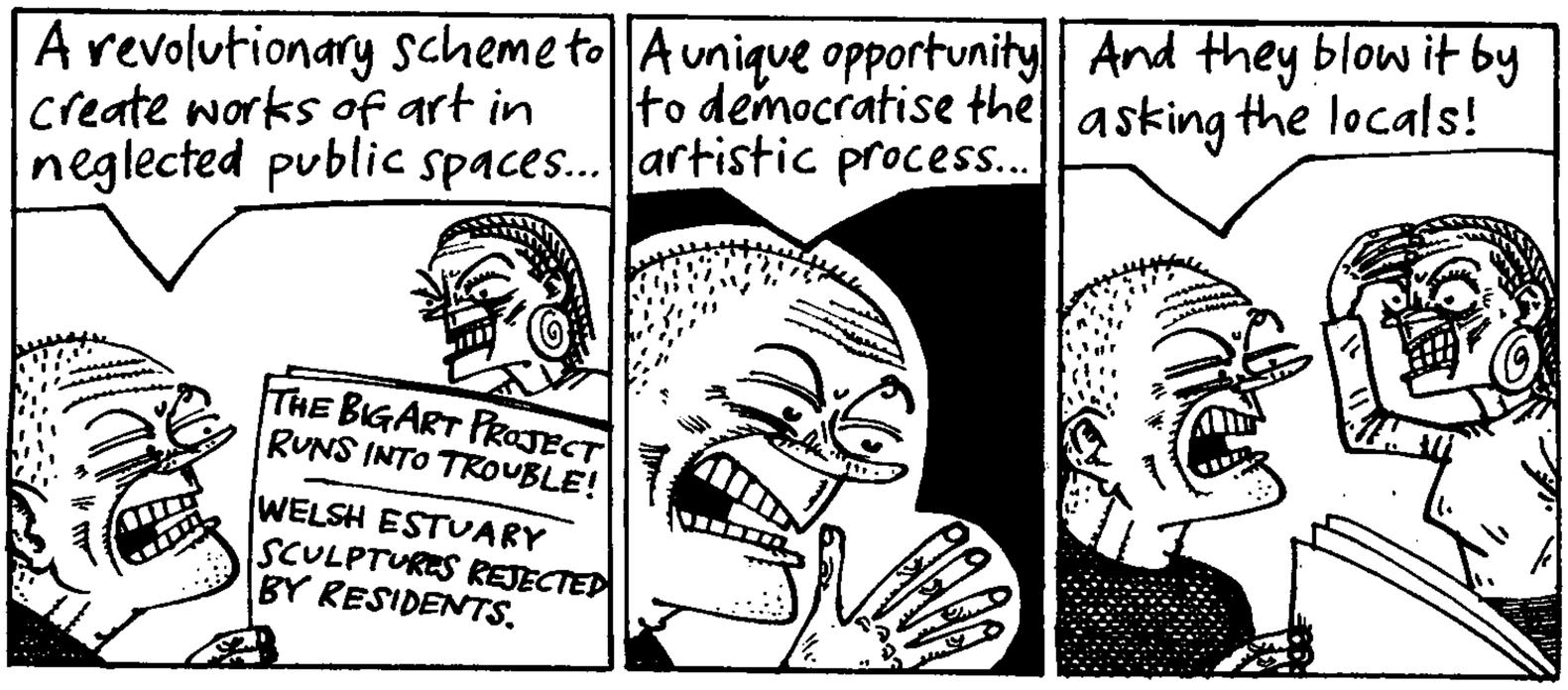
According to Messrs Dunn-buggerall it's the natural next step. And, of course, worth every penny of the advice.

The pity is that Tony Hall and senior staff have been so keen to hear this sort of advice and so deaf to the more sensible counsel of the Andrew Mellon Foundation. Only last month it published the results of a very thorough survey of classical music organisations in the US. According to Mellon, far too much arts money is being wasted on… worthless, ill-conceived and unproductive marketing initiatives!

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH


A revolutionary scheme to create works of art in neglected public spaces...
THE BIG ART PROJECT RUNS INTO TROUBLE!
WELSH ESTUARY SCULPTURES REJECTED BY RESIDENTS.
A unique opportunity to democratise the artistic process...
And they blow it by asking the locals!

Come and catch up with your camp friends and introduce new families to the wonders of a Miniwanca summer

American Youth Foundation, Cleveland Area Miniwanca Party

Letters

Stella line-up

Sir,

Eco-worrier (Eye 1206) doesn't tell us just what percentage of the aluminium to be used in "green" cans for Old Wife Beater will be recycled as part of the brewer's "green initiative", as no doubt this hasn't been announced.

What's the betting that about 33% of the aluminium in the can is recycled? That being roughly the percentage of the metal that the UK already recycles, the cans probably already have that much recycled metal in them, thus saving the brewery too much trouble sourcing them.

By the way, at the risk of finding my way into pedant(')s(') corner, I should point out that Stella Artois is NOT part of Interbrew. Interbrew no longer exists, having merged several years ago with the Brazilian AmBev to form a new company called InBev. And as an indication of how much the company has forgotten its Belgian roots, evidently not a single senior manager noticed that inbev is an Antwerpen dialect word referring to an act of oral sex. Unless they're referring to the taste Stella leaves in the mouth...

TONY GREEN

Ipswich.

Passion killer

Sir,

Remote Controller (Eye 1206) disagrees with the traditional baddies of The Passion *being portrayed as fallible human beings vacillating between the rock of political necessity and the hard place of public acclaim. RC, it seems, prefers the baddies to be 100 percent bad and thoroughable hissable. This approach perhaps might be described as Christianity's answer to the Punch and Judy show. Regarding his point about the use of modern speech, why would it have been any less anachronistic to use 17th Century English in the production than the admittedly debased version of English spoken today? Jacobean English is 400 years closer in time to* The Passion *but can it be assumed that it was any nearer in idiom to 1st Century Hebrew or Latin?*

Yours faithfully,
BRIAN TILLOT,

Surbiton, Surrey.

Lager krauts?

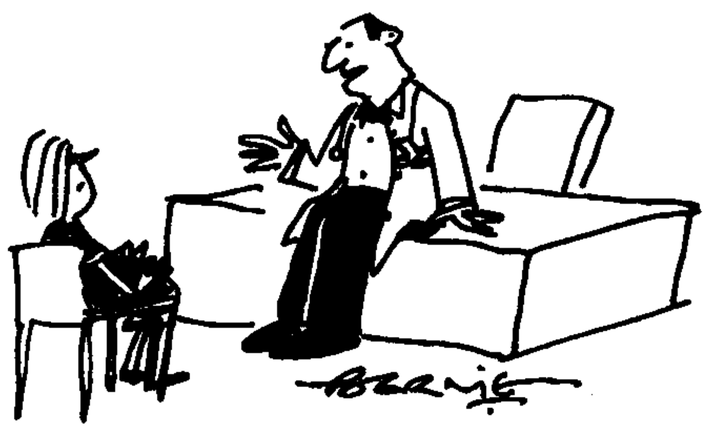
Sir,

Visit any town near a military base in Europe (let alone the UK) and I'd suggest to Square Basher that the vast majority of the under 35s shit-faced on a Saturday night will be squaddies regardless of what they're wearing...

JOHN WOOLFORD,

London E6.

"Frankly, I'd advise you not to drink during your pregnancy because you're only 12..."



Seeing double

Sir,

*In your critical article "Stars In The Eye" (1206) you print "Patrick Swayze had just **weeks** to live", whereas the photograph of the front page story to which you refer clearly headlines "PATRICK SWAYZE JUST **DAYS** TO LIVE", alongide of which there appears a portrait of Jennifer Ellison (Jen).*

Could it be that your organ was also influenced by the distraction of Jen's "amazing 32DD bosoms"?

Yours faithfully,
JOHN LOUDON,

Brentwood, Essex.

Gym won't fix it

Sir,

Your "Ad Nauseam" columnist (Eye 1206) finds it ironic that the government's expensive new anti-obesity ads will only reach those "sitting on their backsides watching telly". Perhaps I'm having an irony failure but I don't quite follow. Would you rather the DoH bought advertising space in gyms?

Yours,
ANDREW CLEGG,

Stoke Newington, London.

Lookalike

Sir,

I was recently taken by a decided similarity between deceased scientist and Sri Lankan-based soothsayer Arthur C. Clarke and "rubber faced" television comedian Harry Hill. Could they be related? If so, it is indeed a "Mysterious World".

Regards,
PHILIP MEEHAN,

Via email.

Going for a Burton

Sir,

May I please be among the several thousand readers who will undoubtedly scramble to point out the following?

It may well be that Mr Andy Burton has recently had a disagreement with a female acquaintance, and was using his status to threaten her reproductive organs with direct violence.

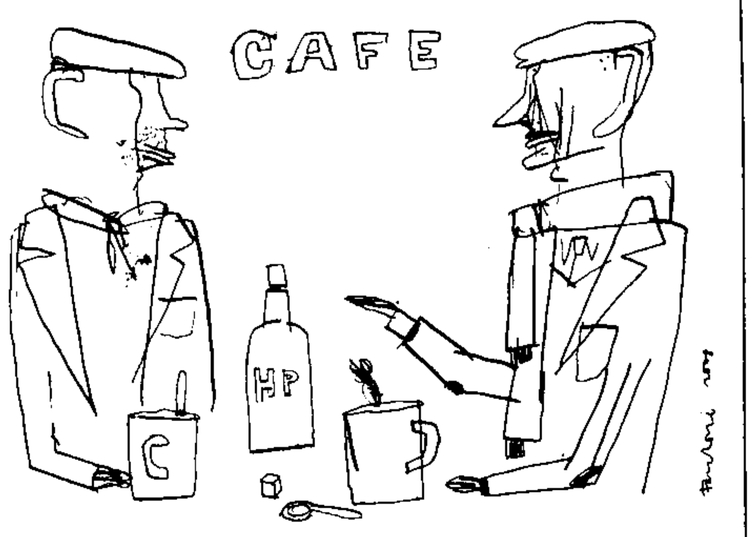
However, you may well think that a more charitable explanation is that he has recently watched the film "Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy", starring Will Ferrell, and set in the Seventies, in which the super-masculine Ron Burgundy trades insults with his new (and unmistakably female) co-anchor as the credits roll on their news program. She is threatened with a "straight shot to the ovary, right in the baby-maker", a phrase which has attained something approaching cult status amongst those of a certain age.

In either case, it may not all be bad news for Mr Burton – Ron Burgundy eventually beds his glamorous co-anchor.

Yours,
JONATHAN WILLIAMS,

Via email.

Scenes You Seldom See



"I agree. The new slim Mac Pro's eight-core processing power is standard and twice as fast but who really needs 3.2 GHz?"

In a previous Liff

Sir,

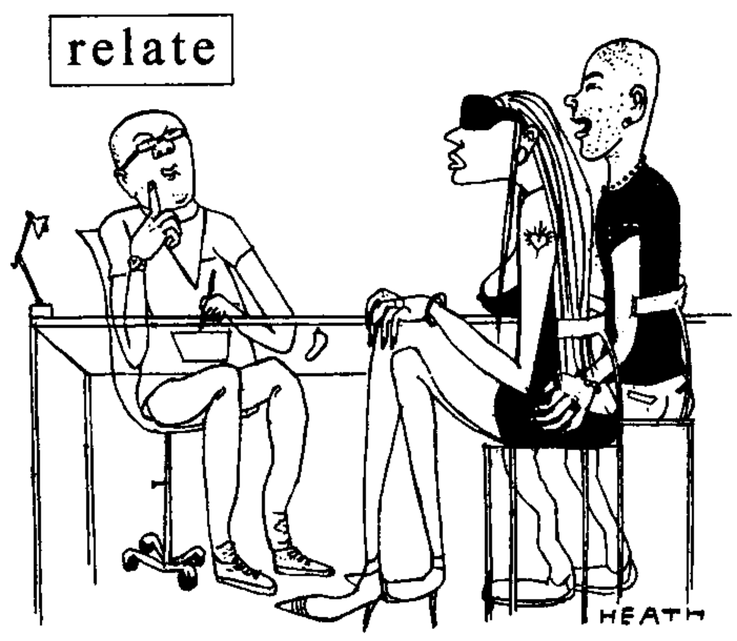
It may be correct to say that Douglas Adams' idea of using English place-names as novel English words in "The Meaning of Liff" has recently been ripped off. However, Adams' executors should not feel aggrieved. After all, Adams himself ripped off the idea from Paul Jennings, whose "Oddly" columns were a delightful feature of the Observer *nearly fifty years ago.*

Adams was a couple of years ahead of me at Brentwood School, and he was taught by the same English master (P.J. Whitcombe) who every year set as a whimsical end of term prep the challenge of extending Jennings' idea.

I wonder whether my current pupils will recall the preps I set in half a century's time?

All good wishes,
JOHN THACKRAY,

Rochester, Kent.



"We haven't had sex for eight hours"

Lookalike

Sir,

I was struck between the similarity between an irate Jade Goody and an elephant seal...

DAN HAYES,

Via email.

Lookalike

Duchess

Shackleton

Princess

Shackleton

Sir,

Fiona Shackleton, divorce lawyer for Paul McCartney and previously Prince Charles, underwent a very interesting metamorphosis after receiving her famous dousing by the volatile Ms Heather Mills. She arrived as the bouffant Camilla and left a tad like the wet-look Diana. Surely they must be related?

Yours,
LYNNE BOOTH,

Via email.

LUVVIES

The actors Jim Carrey and Sir Anthony Hopkins tend to play different parts – but when they met over dinner recently, they found that they used a remarkably similar method. "He asked me about Ace Ventura," Carrey told the Times. "And I said, 'what I was trying to do was be a bird, a parakeet or cockatiel, a fancy, cocky, male bird.' And Sir Anthony said, 'Oh my God, that's what I did with Hannibal Lecter. I was a tarantula and a crocodile'."

The Times

Submitted by Judith Salomon.

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

On air heads?

Sir,

With reference to Dumb Ireland (Eye 1205), perhaps it would be better to stick with Dumb Britain for more contemporaneous stupidity. Or maybe Dumb Private Eye needs to check its sources a bit better.

If I remember correctly, the quiz referred to took place c. 1948 and Radio Athlone stopped broadcasting in the '50s.

Methinks an Irishman has been "extracting the Michael"!

Yours,
CAPT. ROYSTON BENNETT (Retd),
Highworth, Wilts.

Photo opportunity

Sir,

So Pantsman has been proven wrong as Which? magazine shows M&S undies to be the best. Is there any brave soul out there willing to make a stand for male and female M&S vests, I wonder?

Yours,
BILL GALL,

Liverpool.

Mountain guide

Sir,

As a keen amateur pedant and professional geologist I was amazed to read the correspondence in Eye 1206 regarding the changing height of mountains relative to sea-level resulting from deglaciation. To my delight, your cartoonist and your would-be pedantic letter writer are both wrong!

In fact, mountains in those areas weighed down by ice-sheets rebound by more than the global rise in sea-level caused by the melting of their ice burden, whereas those in non-glaciated areas either sink (due to flexing of the underlying continental plate) or stay put and are flooded by rising global sea-levels. The coast of Britain is an excellent example of this: once-glaciated Scotland has risen, forming 'raised beaches' at several heights above the present rising sea-level (which is about 140 feet higher than it was 11,000 years ago), whereas Cornwall has been flooded to submerge King Arthur's Lyonesse (an ancient forest in Mounts Bay near Penzance) and create drowned valleys ('rias') such as the Helford and Fal estuaries.

Isn't science wonderful!

Yours annoyingly,
JOHN CATER,

Via email.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

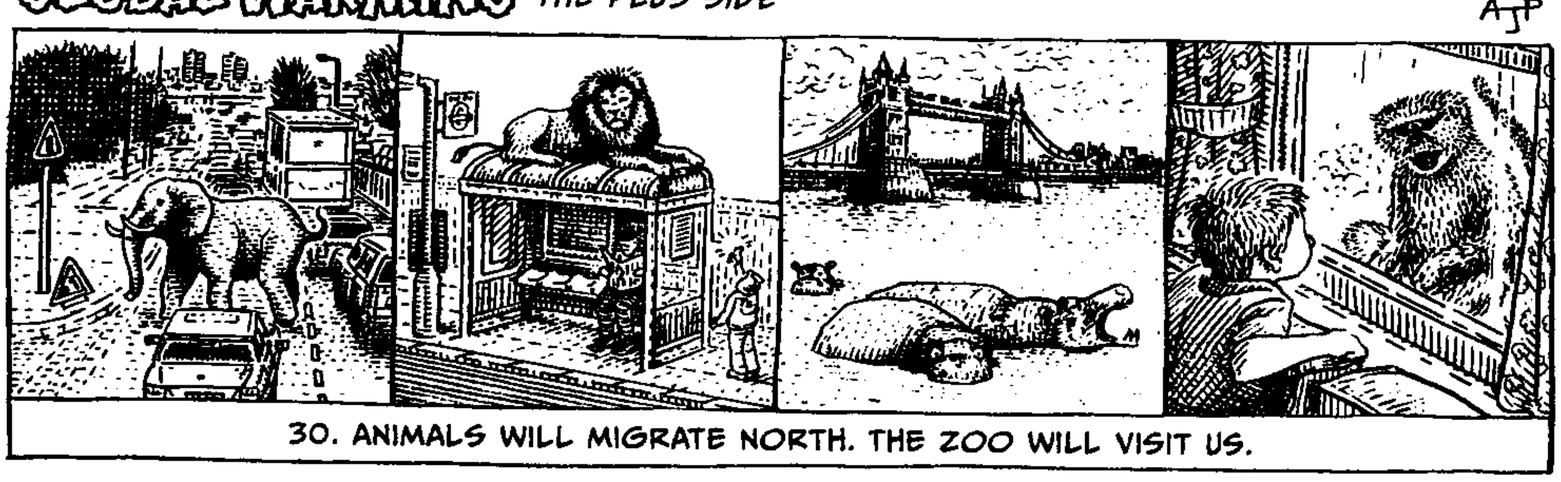
"In the Budget, that rabbit pulled from the hat backfired."
NORMAN SMITH, Radio 4
(Don Salter)

"It isn't called Windy Wellington just because it rhymes."
GEOFF BOYCOTT, Radio 5 Live
(Mark Garnett)

"He [Ricky Hatton] was unbeaten until he lost."
SIR PETER BLAKE, BBC1
(Space Waster)

"We played well and had chances, but then we held a gun to our heads and pulled the trigger twice."
GLENN ROEDER
(Tim Ecclestone)

"I don't have a benchmark – the benchmark is the next election."
DAVID CAMERON, BBC
(Steve Nunn)



Abuse of power

Sir,

I'm in the process of reading an excellent book, "Conquerors of Time" by Trevor Fishlock, in which he explores various innovations and explorations which made the modern world.

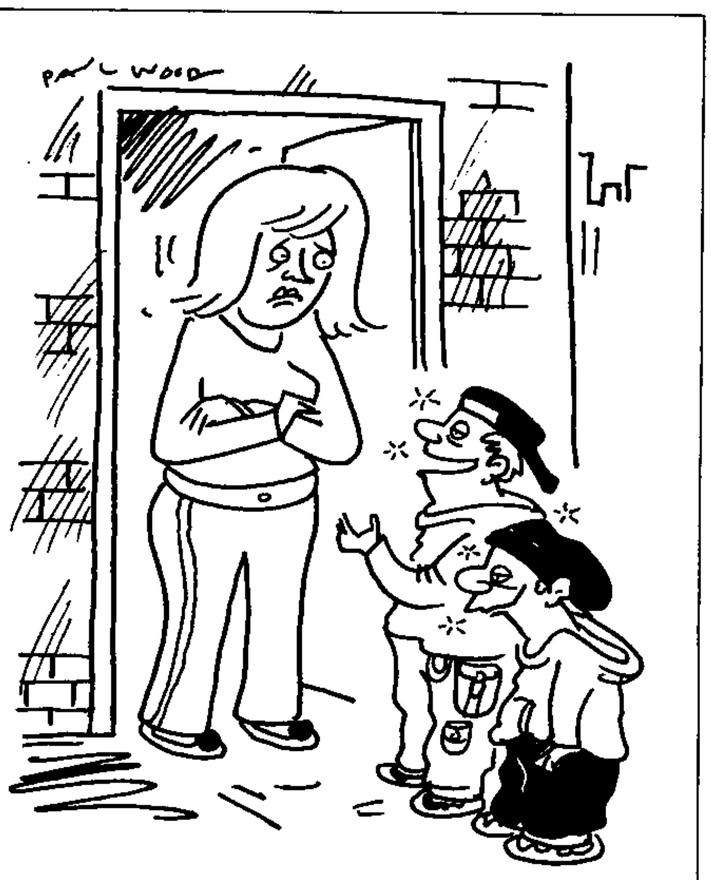
At one point (p. 113, paperback) he is discussing the development of the postal services in the 16th century, and comments that:

"Members of Parliament had the right to send ten free letters a day, a privilege they soon learnt to abuse. They signed blank letters for their friends and also for their servants who sold them in lieu of pay."

How refreshing to know that nothing like that could possibly happen today !

Regards,
DON HILL,

Barnsley.



"Can Johnny come out to get pissed in the corner shop?"

Pe'dants Corner

... No, Edward Windsor, Hitler wasn't a vegetarian (P'edants Corner, Eye 1206), despite what you'll read in some books (so you're the fule). According to his personal chef his favourite food was Bavarian sausage and stuffed pigeon; he also had regular injections of liquidised bulls' testicles.

The myth was invented by Himmler, who wanted to portray Hitler as a revolutionary ascetic who didn't smoke, drink, eat meat, eat rich food, or be idle. Hitler didn't smoke, the rest were lies.

STEPHEN BAYLEY.

... Mary Hinge (P'edants Corner, Eye 1206) might like to note that the collective noun for starlings is a murmuration, but as such terms were just whimsical inventions of Victorian country clergymen with too much time on their hands, there is nothing correct about them. Any countryman will tell you that the correct collective noun for starlings is a "fuckovalot".

JONATHAN SWALE.

... Prince Harry is third in line to the throne, not second as reported on page 7 of issue 1206.

BARRY J. LENNOX.

... I wonder whether your choice of two Vietnamese flags to illustrate the Chinese Olympics on your front cover was intentional. I failed to work out the connection.

PHILIP STADDON.

● The stars were meant to be decorative features, not flags. Art Ed.

"You seek The World of Leather? Then you must first cross The Land of Rugs, then traverse The Kingdom of Kitchens and finally journey through The Empire of Electrical Appliances!"

Letter from **Tripoli**
from Our Own Correspondent

OUR seventysomething "Brother Leader" is – according to the official nomenklatura – but a humble "Guide" to the *Jamahiriya*, or State of the Masses. But Colonel Muammar Gaddafi is of course more than that, as the world will see at the fiesta planned next year to mark the 40th anniversary of the coup he led against King Idriss Sanoussi.

For Libya is changing. Gone are the days when we helped the IRA and any number of other worthy causes with money that might otherwise have been spent turning Tripoli and the even shabbier Benghazi into modern cities. We are no longer in the global "revolutionary vanguard" – especially since Tony Blair helped us mend our fences with Washington after 9/11. Today we win plaudits for our "liberalising tendencies" rather than for overthrowing imperialist lackeys.

In the process we are helping to make business gurus like Harvard Professor Michael Porter very rich – his Monitor Group drew up a national economic strategy for our Brother Leader's "liberalising" and "reformist" son, Saif al-Islam, and has stayed on to dispense market strategies ever since.

Saif al-Islam is just one of the old boy's offspring now champing at the bit. For the moment, though, Gaddafi Snr shows little sign of winding down. As soon as he came back from his latest trip to Paris, where he literally camped on Sarko's lawn, he announced a restructured government with almost no ministers. The "Revolutionary Leader" is finally promising to spread around our oil wealth – indeed, now a pensioner himself, he was awarded the very first payment out of a new fund, highlighting the Gaddafi family's commitment to redistribution.

For the future draws ever closer and the Gaddafi children appear to have every intention of shaping it. Abroad, most attention focuses on the reform-minded Saif al-Islam, but who can ignore his four full brothers: footballing psycopath Es-Saadi, who is staying in Italy after a family bust-up; fast-rising security chief Al-Mutassim, who some regime hardliners are backing for the top; playboy Hannibal, who recently caused us such embarrassment with his headline-grabbing antics in Paris; and the young Khamais, who is already a big noise in the military and is said by some to be Muammar's favourite?

Then there is big sis Aicha, a feisty lawyer who leapt to the defence of Saddam Hussein and once drew crowds as she harangued her hosts at Speaker's Corner in your Hyde Park. The Leader has also rehabilitated his son by an earlier marriage, Mohammed Gaddafi – allowing him to make a fortune from telecoms. Mohammed, like Es-Saadi, is also big in sport.

The children's taste for business is helping to reshape Libya as an investment and leisure destination of choice – at least it is for those lucky enough to win the family's favour.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

"The knullborgarmarket badge is our organisation's most illustrious honour," Joakim Jakobsson of the Swedish Association for Sexuality Education (RFSU) told reporters in Stockholm, "and is awarded for excellence in the carnal arts. Since our organisation was founded in 1933, more than 35,000 people have earned the right to wear it, but only after taking a three-month course of study and answering questions on everything from the application of the dildo and the location of erogenous zones, to the mysteries of the female ejaculation and identifying types of lubricant. People from all walks of life are proud to wear the badge and to display our 'licensed to shag' certificate on their walls, including several prominent politicians, most notably Mona Sahlin, who is leader of the Social Democrats.

"But sadly, the RFSU has now been forced to withdraw the knullborgarmarket badge, after protests from the overly zealous Swedish Swimming Federation. For years, they have been complaining that our logo bears a very close resemblance to the badge they confer on Swedish swimmers, and after lengthy discussions we have now reluctantly agreed to stop using our badge. So although 2008 is the year in which we celebrate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the RFSU, we will regrettably no longer be able to officially certify our members as bonkers." *(The Local [Sweden], 17/12/07. Spotter: Alan Baines)*

– o –

REAL MAN WITHOUT BANANA IS DEAD.

BANANA is among the fruits that are required in our daily lives. The National Academy of Science in USA suggests that human beings should eat fruits and vegetables, especially BANANA, at least 9-14 daily. BANANA is best recommended for the elderly, in order to reduce risk-threatening conditions and bring about adequate erection and man power development. BANANA is fine.

As a baby requires the mother's breast is how a man needs BANANA. Its shape even speaks louder. BANANA! Being the major food of monkeys enables any monkey to do a man's responsibility better with his spouse. BANANA!

Adams Natural Care is the home of MR BANANA. A specialised consultant on all sexually related diseases by research, he has discovered our fore-father's antidote called 'ERO'

in Yoruba. Mashed with BANANA and other natural ingredients, it becomes a good and major cure for weak erection, low sperm count, and general ejaculation problems.

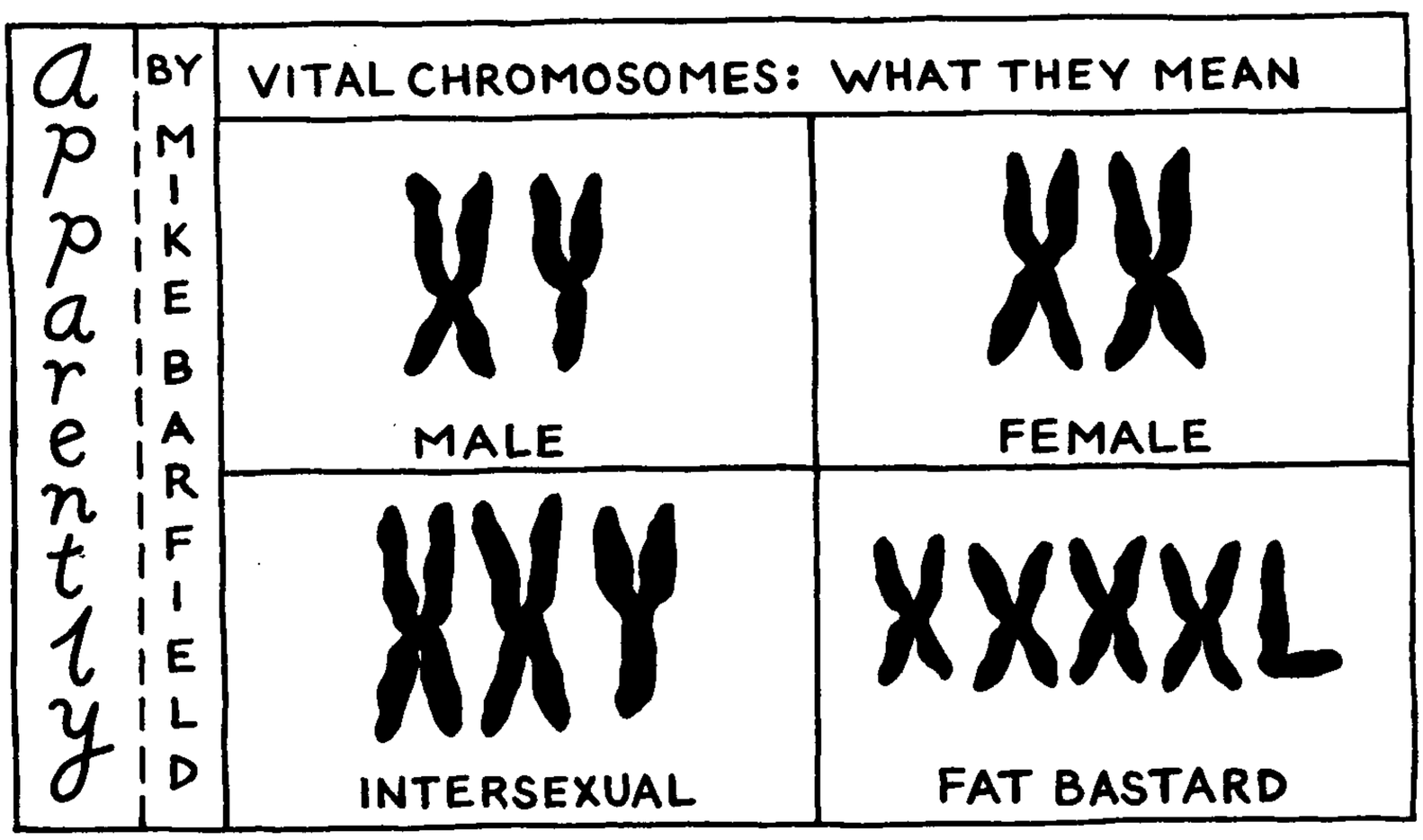
Contact MR BANANA for all your Natural Nutritional Requirements at Adams Natural Care, 8, Ogunnipobi Street, Off Akilo Road, By Marketing Bus Stop, Agogo, Lagos. (Advertisement in New Age [Nigeria], 26/11/07. Spotter: Dan Rogger)

– o –

"Ever since I entered Trondheim prison, I have had to face grave threats to my Sami identity," Johan Aslak Haetta declared in a letter to the President of the Samidiggi (the Parliament for the indigenous people of Norway). "There is a lack of dried reindeer meat on the menu, although non-Norwegian foods like pizza and pasta are regularly served. I have had to fight for the right to wear my traditional Sami clothing, and the prison authorities still deny me the right to use my lasso. They tell me it's for security reasons, but that is incomprehensible to me. I mean, the lasso is only twenty metres long, and the distance from the prison wall to the nearest tree must be at least forty metres, so how could I use it to escape?"

Haetta, who is serving a ten-year sentence for murder, added that "I do not want to talk about what happened, except to say that it happened while I was inebriated in the city of Kautokeino. He fired at me twice with his shotgun. Then he pressed the hot barrel of the gun against my forehead. Another man hit me on the head with a shovel, and I reached for the shotgun as I fell. I fired three shots and a man died there in the dark. Utterly pointless. I was not unfortunate, just stupid and drunk. But why can I not practise my lasso?" *(Adresseavisen, 24/1/08. Spotter: Nina Lager Vestberg)*

Apparently BY MIKE BARFIELD



PRIME MINISTERIAL DECREE NO. 18

From the Desk of the Supreme Leader

Citoyens!

You see, the Supreme Leader can speak French, contrary to reports in the reactionary Barclay-Dacreist-Murdochite press!

And Comrades will have appreciated the triumph of my recent summit meeting with our closest ally from the People's Republic of France, Comrade Sarkozy.

Britain, under my leadership, will always be ready to extend the hand of fraternal friendship to those less fortunate than ourselves.

In this instance, we recognised the plight of Comrade Sarkozy who, within only a very short time of becoming his country's Supreme Leader, has seen his popularity plummet to unprecedented depths.

His clumsy and incompetent attempts to tackle the excesses of global capitalism and to prop up a failing bank have made him a laughing stock.

No wonder Comrade Sarkozy turned in his hour of need to a wise and experienced counsellor whose economic record speaks for itself – even in French!

Vive la Prudence! (This impromptu aside was formulated by the Jocularity Delivery Unit, no.373846/b filed under Multilingual Banter, as part of the rolling out of the strategy for bringing out the human side of your Supreme Leader.)

President Sarkozy has expressed his gratitude to me for allowing him to be seen associating with one of the most prominent Supreme Leaders on the world stage.

As he told me on the occasion of our historic talks at the iconic home of British football, Monsieur Wenger's Emirates Stadium, "Thank you, President Brown, for permitting to share in your charisma, which I know will restore my standing amongst the French comrades".

As I replied to him (in competent rather than show-off, flashy French of the type used by the discredited former leader, the hated Comrade Blair), "Vive la nouvelle Brownite-Sarkozyist-anti-Merkelist-Entente-Cynicale".

The Supreme Leader

Gordon Brown

A Historical Correction

To The Comrades of London

We salute the incomparable achievements of Comrade Ken Leninspart, who for eight years has directed the affairs of our great capital city with unfailing diligence and vigilance.

His open-handed generosity to our Afro-Caribbean Comrades (many of them imaginary) has been an inspiration to all Londoners. Other ethnic groups to have benefited from his generosity include the hard-pressed Scottish whisky distillers; the German workers who produce the popular bendy buses; the Venezuelan oil workers who toil for no reward to serve the world revolution led by their revered President Chavez; and the Middle-Eastern Imamist community, who have added so much to the life of our capital.

In this light, I would like to emphasise that a number of directives issued previously by myself are hereby withdrawn – namely, Directive 2004/17 "The Errors Of The Infantile-Deviationist-Trotskyite Fool Leninspart"; Directive 2007/86 "How The Self-Promoting Traitor Leninspart Betrayed Everything Our Great Party Stands For"; and Directive 2006/512 "Should Pigeon-murderer Ken Be Tried For Genocide In The Massacre of Trafalgar Square?".

These Directives are now officially "Non-Directives" and have never been written. G.B.

The Political Poem That Everyone Is Talking About

by Official State Poet **Comrade Anon**

At Downing Street upon the stair /

I met a man who wasn't Blair /

He wasn't Blair again today /

Let us rejoice that this man is Gordon Brown, the Supreme Leader, rather than the disgraced Bushite Neo-Imperialist Lackey who fortunately has gone away.

This Week's Directives

1. As Commissar 'Red Dawn' Primarolo has announced, in future it will be a criminal offence for my retail establishment to display any tobacco product. By this means, our nation's youth will not know where to obtain cigarettes and their lives will thus be saved for productive purposes.

2. As Commissar 'Green John' Hutton has announced, Britain is to build hundreds of new French nuclear power stations, which will save the planet by providing millions of British jobs for Russian, Indian and Japanese skilled workers.

3. As Commissar 'Silly Millie' Band has announced, there will be no counter-productive, infantile protests against the Olympic Games shortly to be staged by our Chinese allies. Comrades are reminded that these Games are also scheduled to take place in London in 2012, and the Supreme Leader does not wish to be embarrassed by the provocative actions of dissidents agitating over supposed 'human rights abuses' by the host nation in countries which they have invaded.

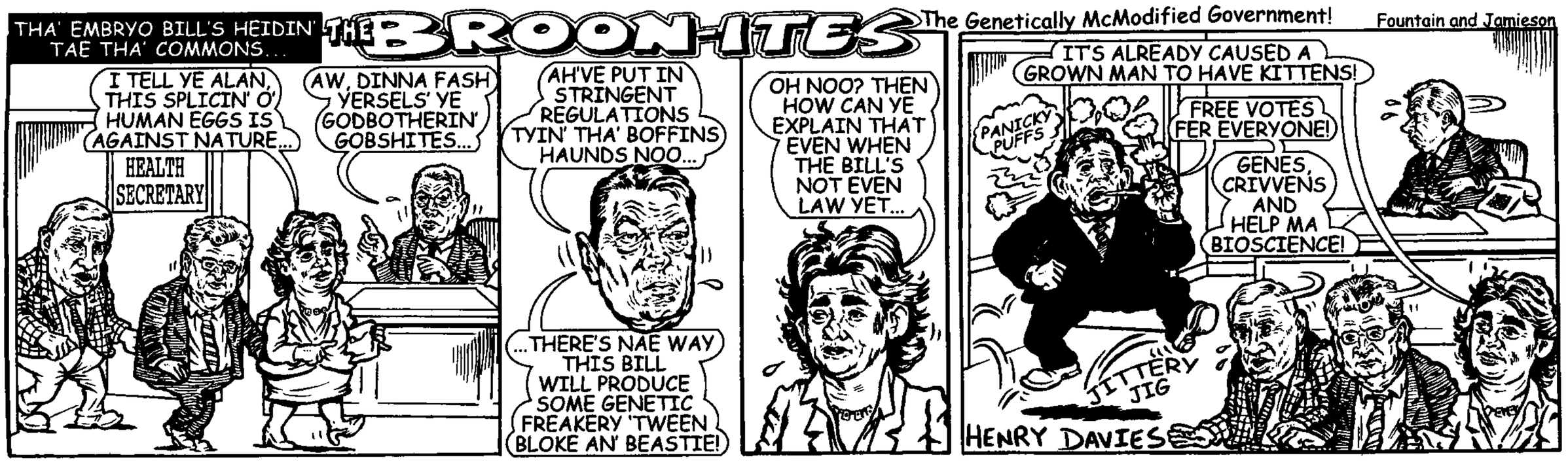
THE CLINTSTONES - THE PREHISTORIC FIRST FAMILY

So you weren't under fire, Hillary?
No... but I am now!
Liar! Liar! Liar!
That's snipey!
I wasn't lying. I misspoke!
Don't worry! When I was president I misspoked!
YABADABOSNIAHERZEGOVINA!

THE BROON-ITES

The Genetically McModified Government!

Fountain and Jamieson


THA' EMBRYO BILL'S HEIDIN' TAE THA' COMMONS...
I TELL YE ALAN, THIS SPLICIN' O' HUMAN EGGS IS AGAINST NATURE...
HEALTH SECRETARY
AW, DINNA FASH YERSELS' YE GODBOTHERIN' GOBSHITES...
AH'VE PUT IN STRINGENT REGULATIONS TYIN' THA' BOFFINS HAUNDS NOO...
...THERE'S NAE WAY THIS BILL WILL PRODUCE SOME GENETIC FREAKERY 'TWEEN BLOKE AN' BEASTIE!
OH NOO? THEN HOW CAN YE EXPLAIN THAT EVEN WHEN THE BILL'S NOT EVEN LAW YET...
IT'S ALREADY CAUSED A GROWN MAN TO HAVE KITTENS!
PANICKY PUFFS
FREE VOTES FER EVERYONE!
GENES, CRIVVENS AND HELP MA BIOSCIENCE!
JITTERY JIG
HENRY DAVIES

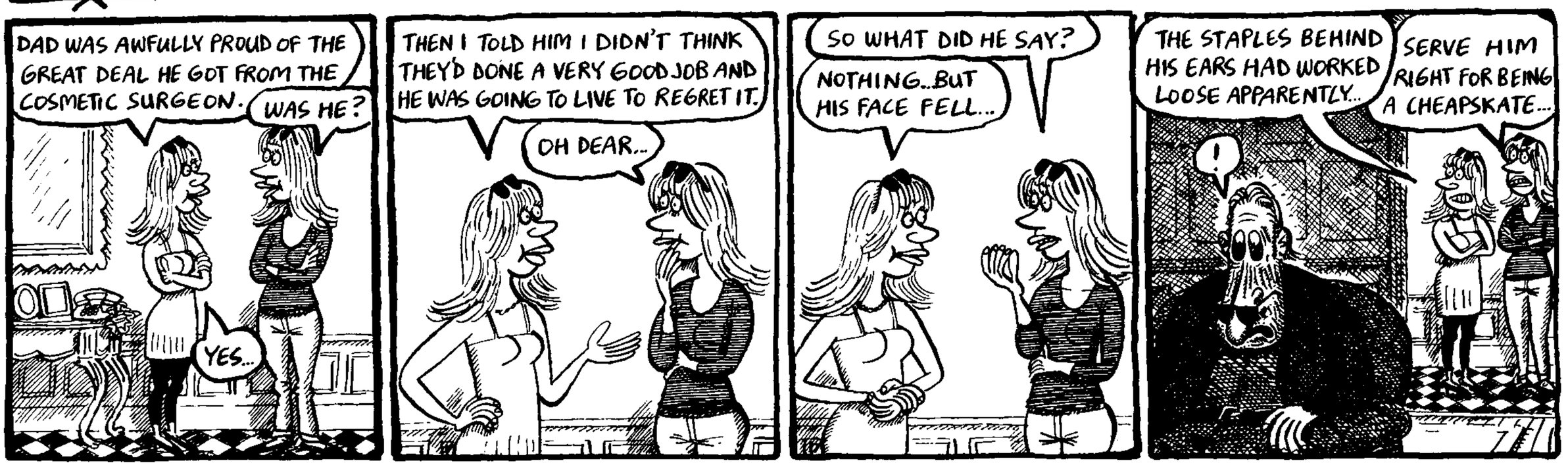
the PREMIERSH*TS

Paul Woods

I AGREE WITH FERGUSON THAT IT WILL GO DOWN 'TO THE WIRE'...
PREMIER LEAGUE ENTERS FINAL STAGES
WHY'RE YOU SENDING ME OFF YOU BLIND TWAT?
WHY'RE YOU SUBBING ME YOU IDIOT?
TWAT
WANKER
HOTEL
WHY'RE YOU NOT SHOWING ME MORE RESPECT?
WHY'RE YOU KEEPING YOUR KNICKERS ON, DON'T YOU KNOW WHO I AM?

Celeb

LIGGER


DAD WAS AWFULLY PROUD OF THE GREAT DEAL HE GOT FROM THE COSMETIC SURGEON.
WAS HE?
YES...
THEN I TOLD HIM I DIDN'T THINK THEY'D DONE A VERY GOOD JOB AND HE WAS GOING TO LIVE TO REGRET IT.
OH DEAR...
SO WHAT DID HE SAY?
NOTHING..BUT HIS FACE FELL...
THE STAPLES BEHIND HIS EARS HAD WORKED LOOSE APPARENTLY...
SERVE HIM RIGHT FOR BEING A CHEAPSKATE...

Madame Carla Bruni-Sarkozy
An Apology

IN COMMON with all other newspapers, we may have given the impression in recent weeks that we held a low opinion of Madame Carla Sarkozy née Bruno, considering her in some way an unsuitable consort for a French Head of State.

Headlines such as "Sarko's French Tart Leaves Bitter Taste", "Carla Nudi Gets French Knickers In A Twist" and "Jagger's Ex-Shagger Marries Top Frog" may have contributed to this unfortunate misunderstanding.

We now realise that there was not a jot or scintilla of truth whatsoever in any of the above and that Madame Sarkozy is in fact a symbol of French elegance and chic, a Gallic icon comparable to Coco Chanel, Brigitte Bardot and the Eiffel Tower. She is, moreover, the new Jackie Kennedy and the new Diana, Princess of Wales all rolled into one – seductive, breathtaking, dignified, elegant... Phwooar!? Cor!?! Quelle scorcheuse!!

We would like to apologise unreservedly to the First Lady of France for any distress caused by our earlier reports.

ON OTHER PAGES: ● ***Those Nude Carla Pix In Full* 2-94.**

BORIS SPELLS IT OUT

la Repubblica 4.4.08

Nation Falls For Glamorous Bruni

by Our Political Staff **Glenda Slaggiatelli**

Londra, Tuesday

THE ENTIRE country has gone Bruni-crazy as gorgeous Gordono Bruni has seduced everyone with his chic style and his surly frown *(Is this right? Ed.)*

As soon as he stepped out of Number Ten with his designer M&S grey suit and Tie-Rack tie, Bruni knocked them dead.

Il Shocko

Even those sceptics who had been determined not to like Bruni were won over by his extraordinary charisma and personal charm.

"We've never seen anything like it. I've gone weak at the knees!" said one open-mouthed admirer, Ed Balls. "Bruni has previously been associated with some of the world's most glamorous women, including Jacqui Smith, Harriet Harman and Dawn Primarolo – but now he has become the biggest political pin-up since James Chuter-Ede." *(Who he? Ed.)*

Spot the Photo Opportunity: Competition No.94

Can you guess what the French and English premiers are hoping to achieve by having their pictures taken pretending to play football with Arsene Wenger in an empty stadium?

Simply put a cross next to the name of "David Cameron" in the next election and **you'll** be a winner!

That British-French Royal State Bonkquet Menu In Full

Crudities
Frog's Leg-over on Garlic Bed
Bruni Windsor Soup
Minestosterone

– ❋ –

Filly of State with Newd Potatoes
Breast of Spring Chicken with French Has-Bean Goose
Droules Marinières

– ❋ –

Petits Phworrs
Cheese: Old Goat's (with a Cracker)

– ❋ –

TO DRINK:
53-year-old French Randy (Cor!voisier)
Eau de Vie-agra

The Regimental Band of the Queen's Own United Emirates played a selection of hits from Mozart's "Sarkozy Fan Fruity"

£1.7 MILLION MAKEOVER FOR SPEAKER

By Our Political Staff Phil Expenses-Form

THE HISTORIC Speaker, Mr Mick Gorbals, is to be the subject of a million-pound renovation paid for by English Heritage. Said a spokesman, "In recent years, cracks have appeared in the Speaker's façade and there are said to be ugly red blotches on his nose.

"It is important for the nation to give him a complete overhaul."

However, critics say the Speaker is a wreck and is beyond repair. They claim the money would be better spent on a free one-way ticket to Glasgow for him and all his family."

●Have you been affected by any of the issues raised by this news item? If so, you can get help and advice on the BBC website at speakertrauma.bbc.co.uk

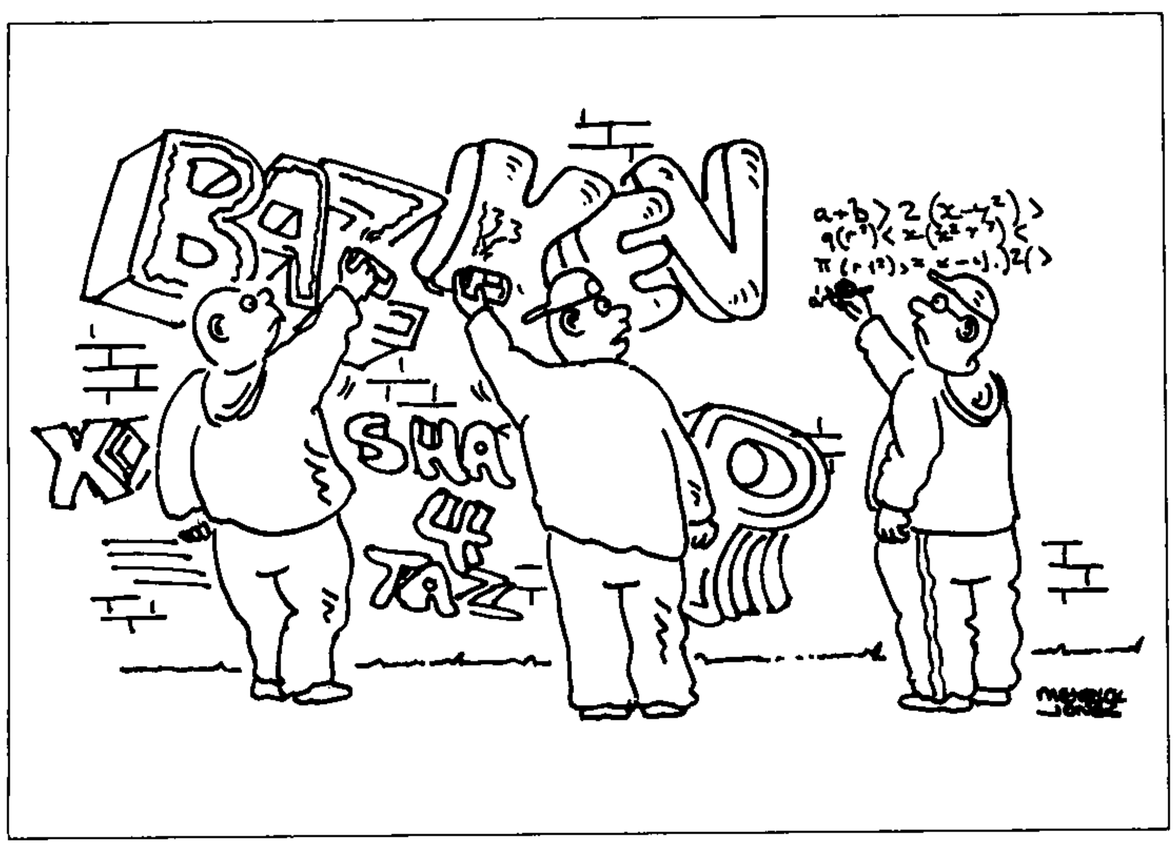
How They Are Related

Sarah Russell née Rothermere

The First Lord Harmsworth
|
The Second Lord Harmsworth
|
The First Lord Harmsworthless
|
The Second Lord Charmless
|
Arthur Daley Mail
|
Lord Dacre of Houseprice
|
Sir Hitler of Hastings
|
The First Lord Rothermere
|
The Second Lord Ratheryouthanmere
|
Sir Peregrine Harmsworthorne
|
Bertrand Russell
|
Russell Twisk
|
Sarah Sands

Sir Mark Thatcher

Iron-Age Man
|
Man In The Iron Mask
|
The Iron Chancellor
|
Jeremy Irons
|
The Iron Lady
|
Lady Falklander
|
Lady Not-For Turning
|
Vera Grandmother
|
Sir Denis The Menace
|
Sir Charles the Moor
|
Sir Roger Moore (star of *The Wild Geese*)
|
Coup Stark
|
Jeffrey Archer



'PASSENGER ACTION' CAUSES DELAYS AT NEW HEATHROW TERMINAL

by Our Transport Correspondent **Phil Shops**

A BAA spokesman has said that high numbers of passengers had turned up at the airport with lots of bags "expecting to simply queue up, load their baggage and get on their planes in under four hours".

"This problem of 'passengers' seems to go from bad to worse," he said. "But there is no need to worry because Terminal 5 is working just as well as all the other terminals."

What is passenger action?

1. Passengers turn up at the time instructed on their ticket
2. Passengers then expect to have their bags loaded promptly
3. Passengers then think that they can just 'go and board their plane'

T5 Chaos Praised

Superlatives have been heaped on the state-of-the-art chaos on display as the Richard Rogers-designed Heathrow Terminal 5 opened for business.

"With its vast sweeping baggage delays and acres of cancelled flights, this is chaos unlike anything experienced previously at any foreign airport," said one early visitor to the Terminal.

"Terminal 5 proves that when it comes to designing chaos in airports, no one can touch us Brits."

Calls For T6 Grow

British Airways today stepped up calls for an inquiry into the creation of a brand new state-of-the-art Terminal 6 at Heathrow to ease the nightmare of passengers forced to use the brand new state-of-the-art Terminal 5.

New from Royal Mail

The Royal Mail is proud to issue a set of six commemorative stamps celebrating GREAT BRITISH INCOMPETENCE.

Set includes: Wobbly Bridge, Wembley Stadium, Millennium Dome, Diana Fountain, Terminal Five and London Olympics 2012!

SEND £37.50 NOW TO GREAT BRITISH INCOMPETENCE OFFER (if you can find a W.H. Smith Post Office) and we promise to lose your letter and cheque

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam
Richard Widmark,
Hollywood Film Star

So. Farewell
Then Richard
Widmark –
Famous for your many
Cowboy roles.

(I cannot
Remember any
Of them at
The moment, but
Keith tells me
They are often on
TCM in the
Afternoon.)

Unfortunately you
Were not in *The*
Magnificent Seven.

Otherwise I could
Have included
The theme tune again.

All together now –
Dum di-da-da-dum
Dum di-da-da-dum
Da-da
Di-da-DA-da...

E.J. Thribb (Magnificent 17½)

● E.J. Thribb's popular blog *A Day In The Life Of A Threnodist* can be found at www.thribbblog.com ("Over one hit daily" – Keith)

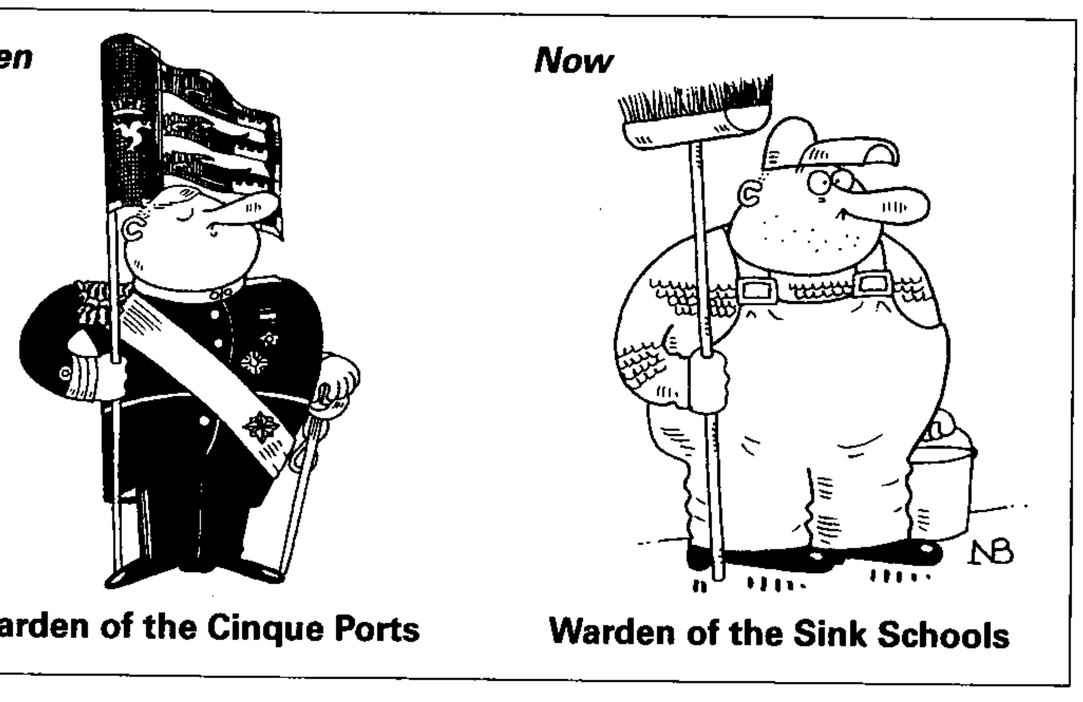
MODERN INN SIGNS

KEEP ARMY OUT OF SCHOOLS, SAY TEACHERS

by Our Education Staff **Phil Register**

ADDRESSING the Easter conference of the teaching union NUTCASE (National Union of Teachers, Classroom Assistants and Sex Educators), the union's assistant deputy general secretary, Mr Norman Spart, a media studies lecturer at the Dollis Hill College of Further Education, said, "It is totally sickening to my mind that the Government should allow members of the Armed Forces to go round schools spreading their fascist propaganda and recruiting kids to become murderers and torturers serving the wishes of the military-industrial complex... er..."

Earlier, Mr Clive Spart, the deputy assistant general secretary of NUTCASE, a curriculum technologist at the North Circular Beacon Academy, had proposed a motion that all schools should be visited for several hours a week by extremist Imams, to explain the centrally important role of Jihad in modern Britain.



THE DAILY TELEGRAPH Friday, April 4, 2008

Letters to the Editor

The Army And Schools

SIR – I am sure many of your readers will be cheered to read of the Government's plan to send the British Army into our schools.

For too long, our brave boys have been cooped up at Basra Airport, keeping the peace by trying to avoid being shot at whilst various factions of towelheads sort out their differences in the traditional way favoured in these parts, e.g. by murdering each other. As one who served in Mesopotamia in at least one World War, I can only applaud this new plan to redeploy our soldiers into the classrooms of Britain, to restore order by disarming the various warring factions who have reduced our education system to a murderous shambles.

Maj-Gen. Sir Reginald Spunner-Gusset (Retd)
The Old Pillbox, Great Warminster, Wilts.

The Effects Of Climate Change

SIR – As someone who has studied wildlife in my Dorset garden for more than 50 years, I must report to your readers some of the remarkable phenomena which are being caused by global warming.

Although April is barely upon us, roses are in full bloom, cherries are already hanging from the bough and yesterday I saw the first flamingoes arriving on my pond after their long flight from distant Honolulu.

Amazing as it may seem, there is now a small herd of elephants living in my potting shed, and my good friend Buffy Frobisher reports a sighting of hyenas and vultures rifling through his assortment of wheelie bins (for the emptying of which, incidentally, he is charged a criminal £80 a week for a fortnightly 'service' which I can assure your readers is nothing of the kind).

Sir Herbert Gusset
The Wildebeeste & Pineapple (formerly The Lamb & Flag), Sahara Sands, Dorset.

PRESIDENT'S NEW ADVISER

What You Will Hear From Our New Polite Cabbies After They Have Taken Their Council 'Customer Care' Course

"Good morning, guvnor, let me help you with that case. You sit back and enjoy your journey. Can I say right away how much I admire that Ken Livingstone. He's done wonders for London. Just like all these immigrants that come over here. They've really contributed to the economy, and it's great that they want to live here. And another thing, capital punishment is a truly barbaric practice. Fancy stringing people up as though it was the only language they would understand. Where did you say you wanted to go? Heathrow? I'll take you the quick way, it won't cost you as much. I had that Dalai Lama in the back of the cab once. A lovely gentleman, he was. Mind you, I'm not sure he's right about the Chinese. Very clever people. Oh, we're here already! Have a nice day, and don't bother with a tip. The pleasure's been all mine."

BROWN CALLS FOR IRAQ INQUIRY 'But Not Yet'

by Our Political Staff **Sirge Trevor Macdonald**

THE PRIME MINISTER announced today that he will have an inquiry into the Iraq War, but not while Labour MPs were still serving in the House of Commons.

"These men and women are on the front benches, risking their political lives on a daily basis," he said.

"It is not fair to them to pick over the reasons for the conflict while they are still in danger of losing their seats."

When asked how long the inquiry would have to wait, Mr Brown said, "Our brave boys and girls have a job to do and they will be there at least for another two years and possibly more."

He continued, "Morale is desperately low, as they face constant attack in the media. And when they go home to their constituencies they are not treated as heroes, but are subjected to abuse and ridicule.

"No," he concluded, "our MPs are doing their best and they deserve a lot better than some dismal inquiry suggesting they are useless."

SHURKHAS IN EQUAL PENSIONS PROTEST

by Our History Editor **O.A.J.P. Taylor**

THE proud army of Shurkhas who have loyally done nothing for Britain for their entire lives protested furiously yesterday at the ideas that some Nepalese ex-soldiers were going to be paid the same amount as them just for fighting for Britain.

Said the leader of the Shurkhas, Shurkha Howard (known to the Benefits Agency as Mr Michael Mouse), "It's a disgrace. We have spent a lifetime sitting around watching afternoon television and this is how we are rewarded."

Full story and pix, p.8.

Hunt continues for story to replace Maddie

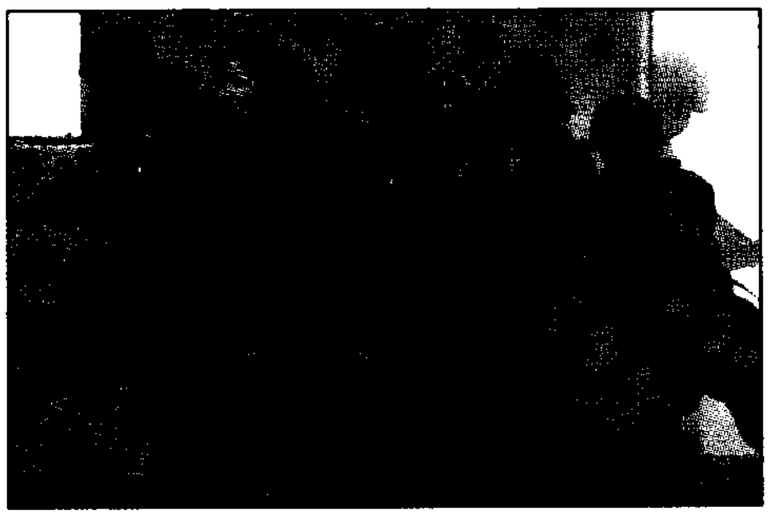
The Daily Express is still appealing to anyone who has seen a story that will replace Maddie. The owner of the Express, Mr Dirty Desmond, made a tearful appeal last night.

"I have lost a huge amount of money paying off the libel bill and I am desperate to find a way of getting it back."

IS SHE THE GREATEST WOMAN IN HISTORY?

HILLARY CLINTON reveals the seven moments in her life which she believes uniquely qualify her to be the next President of the United States.

1 Hillary brings peace to Northern Ireland. Hillary personally brought together the two warring factions, thus paving the way for the Good Friday Agreement which brought peace to that troubled land after 1000 years of conflict.



2 Hillary risks death to liberate Bosnia from the Serbs. Hillary personally led US forces, under a relentless hail of sniper bullets, as they freed the besieged city of Sarajevo from the evil Serbs.

3 Hillary – the secret heroine of 9/11. Hillary personally directed the heroic efforts of New York's firefighters as they saved thousands of lives as the Twin Towers collapsed.

4 Hillary – first woman on the moon. As she stepped from the lunar capsule onto the surface of the moon, Hillary famously remarked, "Vote for me."

5 Hillary leads civil rights movement. Hillary inspired a whole generation of Black Americans to claim their rights with her famous speech – "I have a dream that I'm going to beat Obama in 2008."

6 Hillary's Gettysburg Address ends Civil War. Often wrongly attributed to Abraham Lincoln, the famous speech after the battle of Gettsyburg establishes her reputation as the finest orator of all time.

7 Hillary and the Cherry Tree. When, as a girl, Hillary was upbraided by her father for chopping down his prized cherry tree, she famously responded, "I can tell a lie – it wasn't me, it was that little boy next door, George Washington."

From The Message Boards

Members of the online community respond to the major issues of the day...

Gypsies Set Up Camp Near Tessa Jowell's Home

I feel sorry for the pikey's! ☹ – ***Hunny_pot***

Oh look – machine guns have just appeared on the John Lewis list lol! – ***Cyril_the_cynic***

Go round MUG-aret Hodge's house and ask for a chocolate biscuit like she offers us. But don't sing the proms or you'll be out on yer ear! – ***Barking_born_and_bred***

Theving gippsy's come near my home I swear Ill do time – ***Family_man***

Cigarettes To Be Kept Under The Counter

Why should I, as a taxpayer twice over (highest tobacco tax in the world!) have to smoke under a counter? Sheer madness. – ***Death_and_taxes***

Just a thought, maybe put kids under counter not cigeretes? – ***Peter_Rabbit***

Swings and rounders bats, peter rabit. Keeps kids off the fag's, so safer. But sitting ducks for peados and ab-doctors who cud hide under ther too. – ***Think_about_it***

Minimum Sentences Proposed For Firearms Offences

As a bank robber myself (now retired) I know all about "gun crime". But I carried a sawn-off as a frightener, not a macho toy. We were responsible, experienced villains who knew what we was doing, ask any copper. OK, civilians, including women, were scared and occasionally hurt. Not nice I know. But it was a small price to pay for ORDER – something sadly lacking in today's lawless Britain. – ***Bermondsey_Bob***

Catholic Church Condemns Hybrid Embryos

Concern about human/animal cross-fertilisation is, I'm afraid, a case of locking the door after the horse has bolted. The hooded creatures on our streets are living proof. – ***Edwin***

Wat i dont get is that cathlic ppl r aloud to marry ppl who rnt cathlics if they convert to cathlicism. But there body cells r still non catholic? So medic-aly u r mixing cathlic and non cathlic cells but the cathlic church alows it. So y do they ob-ject 2 this? – ***Hayley_321***

Ex-Soldier Turned Down By Police Because Of 'England' Tattoo

Tatoo a turben on his head, tha'tll do nicely sir! Now u can join the force no worries! lol! ☺ – ***Billy_butlin***

C OF E SPEAKS OUT ON EMBRYO BILL

'Time To Really Think About This One,' Says Bishop

by Our Religious Affairs Staff **Christopher Howseyourfather**

THE CHURCH of England today broke its long silence on the vexed issue of the Government's proposed embryological research bill.

The Bishop of Neasden, the Rt. Rev. J.C. Flannel, did not mince his words in spellling out the position of the C of E on what he called "an issue which raises very profound moral and ethical questions for all of us, in a very real sense".

"You know," he told his congregation at St Bruno's Cathedral, "whilst there may be undoubted benefits of this Bill in terms of research which may save lives and alleviate suffering, we must on the other hand consider the very real dangers which may arise when we interfere in the very processes which are involved in the formation of life itself. And now Hymn 94."

MPs immediately reacted with fury to what one described as "a totally unjustified intervention in the democratic process".

"Who does this Bishop think he is, telling us what to think on such a highly complex issue? They should leave that sort of thing to Gordon Brown."

"We've been a little bit careless with our hybrid embryology, Daedalus"

CAPELLO GIVES BECKS HIS 100TH MILLION

by the BBC's Football Correspondent **Margaret Dribble**

DAVID Beckham yesterday joined the ranks of the all-time richest men in football when he earned his 100-millionth pound.

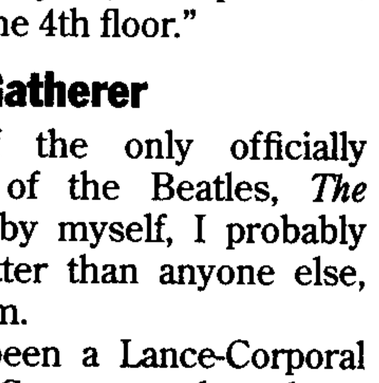
Said the former England captain, "I was stuck on my 99th million for what seemed like an eternity – and then Fabio made my dream come true. It's a great privilege to reach this important landmark in my financial career."

On Other Pages

- Capello to recall Bobby Charlton
- Pete Doherty to be next England captain

Unfortunately for Joe, Liz lay back and thought of England vs France

27th Beatle Dies



by Oonter Davies

THE MAN they called 'The 105th Beatle' has died. He was Ken Lurcher, 69, a softly-spoken lift-attendant at the Apple HQ from 1966 to 1967.

During these crucial years in the evolution of the most famous pop group in history, when Beatlemania was at its height, Ken played a vital role in keeping the Fab Four sane.

"It was me who kept their feet on the ground," Lurcher liked to joke, "except when I was taking them up to the 4th floor."

Oonter Gatherer

As the author of the only officially authorised biography of the Beatles, *The Beatles I Never Knew* by myself, I probably knew Ken Lurcher better than anyone else, although I never met him.

Lurcher, who had been a Lance-Corporal in the Army Education Corps, may have been the inspiration behind 'Sergeant Pepper', the mysterious band leader who became one of the iconic figures in 20th century culture.

Oonter Pants

Certainly Lurcher would have been very familiar to John and Paul, because in addition to his being the regular lift-man at their offices in Savile Row, his aunt Mildred Lurcher lived in Bainbridge Street, Toxteth, next door to Ringo Starr's mother's hairdresser, Phyllis Norman.

It was late in August 1968, that John first *(cont. p. 94)*

DIARY

40 YEARS ON: 1968

MELVYN BRAGG: Positioned exactly one year before 1969 and one year after 1967, two years after 1966 and two years before 1970, by anyone's standards 1968 was a truly momentous year in the history of the late 1960s.

TARIQ ALI: in 1968, a tidal wave swept the world. It started in Vietnam, then blew across Asia, crossing the sea and the mountains to Europe, finally coming to rest on me in London. To my surprise, I found myself in at the centre of the world, and that is where I have remained ever since.

I was delivering an historic and oft-quoted speech to a dedicated group of radicalised intellectuals and assorted heads, freaks, poets and peaceniks, all crammed onto a single metal bed in a modest student bedsit in Maida Vale. Uncomfortable, maybe: but then the truth often is.

Reading my speech today, I find it as relevant today as it was then. "With our mime and our free verse, with our furious posters and our radical theatre," I said. "We shall crush President Charles De Gaulle and his snivelling minions." Powerful, historic words that would, just a few short years later, bring about an end to the capitalist war in Vietnam.

MELVYN BRAGG: On the plus side, death and destruction in Vietnam gave birth to a remarkable renaissance in new British poetry, cinema and theatre. Overnight, a new generation of young artists were prepared to stand up and testify.

VANESSA REDGRAVE: Yes, I testified. If you know that something is right, you've got to testify. That's what Shakespeare's about, that's what Tolstoy's about, that's what I'm about. Sometimes you just have to open your mouth and put your arm all the way in and pull out the rabbit. I made my debut as Irina in Chekhov with Peggy at the Old Vic and in doing so felt that I was making my stand against the war.

MELVYN BRAGG: At the Albert Hall, leading British protest singers The Black and White Minstrels sang songs aimed at the very heart of a British Establishment that they felt was authoritarian, elitist and backward-looking.

BLACK AND WHITE MINSTRELS:

Would you like to fly in my beautiful, my beautiful
Ball-ooo-ooo-ooo-ooo-oooooon!
The world's a nicer place in my beautiful, my beautiful
Ball-ooo-ooo-ooo-ooo-oooooon!

MELVYN BRAGG: And one man, above all others, came to symbolise youthful commitment to radical left wing rebellion.

MICK JAGGER: There was all these like demonstrators in Grosvenor Square and the pigs were out of their heads, man, it was like totally mind-blowing, you just had to be there. I even wrote a song about it, I think it was *I Can't Get No Satisfaction*, 'cos that's exactly what you couldn't get that day, not with all those pigs on horses running around everywhere stopping you getting anywhere near the boutiques and that. Grosvenor Square was a pivotal moment in my life. I'd've even bought a house or two there, only the grey squares in suits advised me Chelsea was a much better scene, investment-wise.

MELVYN BRAGG: In politics, up-and-coming young radicals who wished to uproot international capitalism and bring about an entirely new social order were at last making their voices heard.

JACK STRAW: We were up in arms, demanding nothing less than a social revolution. Our aims were threefold, or, to be more accurate, fourfold. First, we had the long-term intention of passing the control of interest rates from the Government to the Bank of England. Second, we sought to modernise this country's transport systems and make them more competitive with our partners in Europe. Third, we dreamed of putting record numbers of wrongdoers into custody. And fourth, we wished to revolutionise surveillance techniques, so that no potential offender – a category, incidentally, in which, with regret, I include everyone – could expect to walk around our streets undetected.

MELVYN BRAGG: Across the channel in Paris, student radicals hammered out complex prototypes for the revolution and then sculpted them out of brightly-coloured raffia. These student artists were heavily influenced by the Papier Machists, a radical group of young Maoists who sought to attain world revolution by march around Paris plastered in soggy newspapers. Among others at the forefront of the socio-political revolution was the radical avant-garde Japanese artist, Yoko Ono.

YOKO ONO: I will now recite the poem I wrote back in 1968. It is a poem that changed the world.

"Untuck your bed.
Now tuck it up again.
And untuck it.
And tuck it up again.
Perform this act this seven times in a row. Congratulations.
You have just made your bed for the whole of next week."

After I wrote that poem, the war in Vietnam came to an end, the civil rights movement took off in the USA, and all around the world people learned to love on another.

You know something? Words can be very powerful.

MELVYN BRAGG: In that momentous year, the brilliant young author Germaine Greer wrote many trenchant pieces for Tariq Ali's underground newspaper *Little Dwarf*, a radical journal which was specially printed on paper the size of postage stamps, then swallowed to avoid detection by government agents.

GERMAINE GREER: Ours was a truly remarkable generation! We set out to change the world, and it may have been one big fucking sweat but by god, we did. Just look at the evidence! That great radical playwright David Hare is now SIR David Hare. Mick Jagger, bless him, is another Sir, and Melvyn, you're a Lord! Jack Straw's helped bring peace to Iraq, Vanessa's soon to headline as Lady Bracknell in a stunning new production at the Haymarket Theatre, and I myself have recently starred in television's popular *Celebrity Big Brother*. You know what? Forty years on, I think we can darn well afford to give ourselves a big pat on our radical backs.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

Drake's Boyhood Revisited

"Better put these on the top shelf..."

Literary Review

Genital warts and all

The World Is What It Is: The Authorized Biography of VS Naipaul
Patrick French
(Picador, £20)
Must The Show Go On?
Les Dennis
(Orion, £18.99)

THERE may not immediately seem to be much connection between the biography of a Nobel Prize-winning novelist and the memoirs of a game-show host best known for losing his missus to a sitcom actor, but the two volumes represent the same trend in publishing for non-fiction books of all kinds – almost regardless of genre – to resemble a particularly overheated edition of a Sunday tabloid.

And so the biography of the author of *A House for Mr Biswas* and *A Bend in the River* – genuinely great novels – reveals him to be a sado-masochist who once had such a vicious session with his mistress of 20 years that her face was too bruised to go out while his hand was too damaged to write. And his cancer-stricken first wife had to tolerate not only this violent infidelity but also his habitual visits to prostitutes.

And the autobiography of a comedian publicly humiliated by his wife's red-top-reported shagging of Neil Morrissey willingly offers hundreds of pages about exactly what it was like to be a front-page cuckold, precisely how he discovered what Morrissey and Amanda Holden were up to, what they said to each other and his subsequent public encounters with Morrissey at auditions.

What's remarkable about both these books is that, even a few years ago, they would have been written by malevolent third parties, with their subjects pursuing expensive injunctions to prevent them ever reaching the shelf. Indeed, an uninitiated reader of the Naipaul life would surely assume that the author is long dead and the volume an act of revenge commissioned by one of the women he humiliated physically or mentally. But the novelist is alive and has co-operated with his biographer, requesting not a single deletion from the manuscript, while Dennis has willingly placed in the public domain material that fuelled two spreads in the *News of the World*, one of the titles that most gleefully covered the disintegration of his marriage.

To some extent this vulgarisation has happened partly because of a shift in the culture: *Big Brother* and blogging have encouraged a striptease mentality in which intimate confession is the only acceptable form of discourse. Some bookshops will put these two volumes in a section called Biography, others on shelves labelled Non-Fiction, but, really, Waterstone's and Borders should hand over most of the sales floor to an area called Shagging.

Non-fiction publishing now has to have shagging. So, apart from the volumes detailing Sir VS Naipaul as an S/M Shagger and Dennis as a Cuckolded Shagger, WH Deedes of the *Daily Telegraph* is revealed as a Fantasy Shagger of fragrant hackettes in his authorised biography. And Lord Barg, after decades of publishing cheerfully ignored novels about sensitive Cumbrians who get jobs in television, suddenly gets page one coverage for his latest work of autobiographical fiction, simply because it's about a Shagger Whose First Wife Killed Herself.

Mainly, though, these publications reflect the commercial desperation in the industry. With few books shifting units unless they get the nod from Richard and Judy, who are about to retire anyway, the only way of getting something read and talked about is to get them in the newspapers: not so much from serialisation (fees are way down) but from what Gore Vidal calls book-chat. And let's face it, the green eye-shades aren't going to flicker for a considered analysis of Naipaul's position in post-colonial fiction or Dennis's anecdotes about working with Tommy Cooper.

So, at every stage even of a literary biography, the editor is thinking: would the tabloids print this? As a result, *The World Is What It Is* has long stretches of proper scholarly analysis, although French seems a little too trusting of his subject's word. Surely we should be told that VSN "claims not to have read" Paul Theroux's brutal memoir about him, rather than that "he has never read it"? But the reader always senses the imprint's desperation to get Sir Vidia back to another welt-inflicting session with his Argentinian tart.

And *Must The Show Go On?* is so recklessly confessional that even the upbeat section – dealing with the comeback he achieved by sending up his desperation in *Extras* – includes a story about how Dennis almost pissed himself at the read-through.

Ricky Gervais, when questioned over the level of self-abasement to which Dennis subjected himself in *Extras*, argued that the comedian was a willing participant in the scenes. Similarly, some will argue that both men have chosen for us to know the things these books reveal.

But is it as simple as that? The books make clear that Dennis and Naipaul have both suffered from severe depression and self-loathing and so these tawdry publications can plausibly be seen as acts of flagellation and self-harm. It has always been traditional, when dealing with the personally disturbed, to remove all knives and sharp implements from the house. Perhaps, in future, it would be wise to impound their word-processors and list of publishers' numbers.

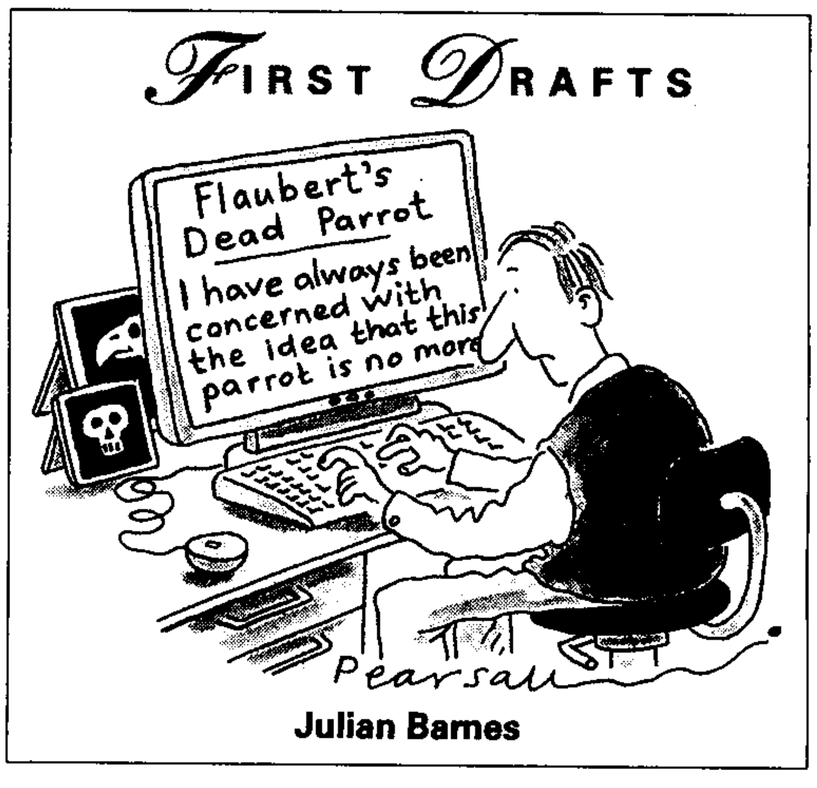
'Book Eyes'

LIBRARY NEWS

■ TESCO and Sainsbury's have grand plans for the small Lancashire town of Colne, currently facing a double whammy of planning applications from both supermarket giants. But it's Tesco's application that has local readers worried: the plans show the new store right where their public library currently stands.

Since Lancashire county council announced just a few months ago that it had won more than £300,000 in lottery money to renovate the library, it remains to be seen whether Tesco will make a big enough offer to tempt it to sell the land.

It's suggested there could be "library facilities" within the new development, but locals have not yet had a chance to find out what that means. When a public meeting was organised last month to allow both stores to introduce their plans, more than 100 residents turned up, but both companies pulled out.



Julian Barnes

WHAT YOU DIDN'T MISS, Pt 94

The Northern Clemency
Philip Hensher
(4th Estate £17.99)

IT WAS 1974 in Sheffield and the Fothergills were having a party. The guests ate Coronation Chicken, hula hoops, Black Forest Gateau, potatoes wrapped in foil with cocktail sticks spiked with cheese and pineapple, Jaffa cakes, pots of Ski yoghurt and... [*continues for several pages*].

"Hello, how do you do?" Graham Fothergill, dressed in a blue suit with moderately flared trousers and wearing a pair of those platform shoes that were so fashionable at the time, remarked to the neighbour standing nearest to him. "I work in insurance." "Do you?" the man wondered, "that's terribly interesting. I'm at the Gas Board. I was just admiring your wallpaper." "Were you?" Graham said. "That's very kind of you. We quite like it too."

Ten feet away Evadne Fothergill was talking to Mrs D'Ulle, her friend from two doors down. "What a nice party," Mrs D'Ulle said, "really festive." "I'm glad so many people have come," Mrs Fothergill told her, "it being the middle of August." "Yes, a good many people do go on holiday then, don't they?" Mrs D'Ulle observed. "We're going to Jersey." "Are you? How interesting. We're going to Dorset. Isn't the price of everything terrible these days?" "Yes isn't it? Do you think Mr Heath will win the election or Mr Wilson?"

Fourteen year-old Millicent Fothergill, lurking by the sofa, thought to herself: I hate them all. I'd much sooner be upstairs reading *Jackie* magazine, trying on my starter bra and listening to my Osmonds records. One day I'll write a novel and put them all in it and get my own back, and then they'll all be sorry, eh up, reet mardy crowd that they are [*other picturesque examples of local idiom follow*]..

"...Yes, there are new people moving in at Number 21," she heard Mrs Crasher saying. "The Teigh-Deheighams, I think they're called. At least, that's what my friend Mrs Crackanthorpe said when we were last walking our King Charleses together." "Do have some more wine," Graham told her, proffering the bottle of Mateus Rose in its wheaty cradle. "There's red or white." "Red *or* white" Mrs Crasher remarked. "I can see you're coming up in the world. Just the kind of man who'll be shopping at the new Sainsbury's, when it opens." "Is it time for the miner's strike yet?" the man who had admired the wallpaper asked. "No," Graham told him sadly, "I'm afraid that's not due for another two hundred pages..." [*continues endlessly*]

Books & Bookmen

■ THE most celebrated example of Booker success after rubbishing your rivals is John Banville: the Irishman won in 2005 after writing a hatchet job review of the runaway favourite, Ian McEwan's *Saturday*.

With a novel, *The Northern Clemency*, out this year (see What You Didn't Miss), Philip Hensher (who is a match for Banville's infamous loftiness, recently saying his 120-plus novel workload when Booker judge was "just my normal six months' reading") is clearly determined to emulate him.

While ostensibly an earnest essay on the state of the state-of-the-nation novel, an article by him in the April issue of *Prospect* soon turns into sneers at the failings of lesser novelists.

The hapless writers called into the headmaster's study are Hanif Kureishi (*Something to Tell You*), Louis de Bernières (*A Partisan's Daughter*), Richard T Kelly (*Crusaders*) and Helen Walsh (*Once Upon a Time in England*). De Bernières gets six of the best for "atrociously clunking" use of public events as markers of his period setting, as do Kelly and Kureishi; Walsh's book is "filled with cliché"; Kelly's has "page upon page of antique diction"; while Kureishi, the best-known rival, takes most punishment, for "silly nostalgia" for 70s radicalism, "unbelievably poor" dialogue and "incredibly... [being] allowed to write a book which, in one respect, is ungrammatical from beginning to end".

All are condemned, too, for finding in pop music a "lazy, easily researched way to evoke a particular moment", usually the 70s. With a splendid parting snoot, Hensher notes that while Kureishi et al were idolising such ephemeral figures as Bowie or the Clash, "my records were mostly of Mahler, Schoenberg and Boulez".

■ TO KEEP *The South Bank Show* going for 30 years on ITV, Melvyn Bragg has needed a wily ability to keep in with his paymasters, and this skill is apparent again in the series' latest line-up.

According to the *Bookseller*, the run will include "a profile of the Bond brand, which looks at the creative and artistic aspects of the Bond films" (endlessly screened and rescreened on ITV, thanks to an exclusive deal), and a profile of novelist Sarah Waters, whose work failed to entice Bragg's film-makers when the BBC dramatised *Tipping the Velvet* and *Fingersmith*, but now meets the series' high standards. The fact that her novel *Affinity* will soon be an ITV series must be coincidental.

■ *GUARDIAN* columnist Zoe Williams found herself very exercised recently by what she called "a small but seemingly quite flourishing eddy of publishing" encouraging British women to emulate their Gallic counterparts.

"Let's try *Two Lipsticks and a Lover*. This is by Helena Frith Powell, who is English rather than French, but – praise be to God – met a French woman once, who told her what one needed to achieve Frenchness... this no-mark Frith Powell – and when I say I am amazed, I'm not being hyperbolic, this really does amaze me – managed to string her observations about the French into another book, *All You Need to be Impossibly French*."

This would be a fair observation but for three things: firstly, that Frith Powell is actually half-Italian and half-Swedish; secondly, that she may well have met rather more than one French woman, having lived in the Languedoc region for the past eight years; and thirdly, she has only written one book on the topic, *All You Need to be Impossibly French* being the name of the US edition of *Two Lipsticks and a Lover*.

■ NO PRIZES for guessing which politician made a pisspoor comparison between the government's green agenda and the Third Reich last week. It was, of course, King Newt himself.

Desperate to distance his mayoral campaign from an unpopular government, Livingstone described plans for the national "energy from waste" scheme as "an evil bit of propaganda". He said: "That's like the Nazis talking about community relations."

As Andrew Hosken points out in his forthcoming biography, *KEN: The Ups and Downs of Ken Livingstone*, the mayor's strained Nazi analogies were put to use long before he compared *Evening Standard* reporter Oliver Finegold to a concentration camp guard in 2005. And each time Ken draws a Hitler parallel, his audience can be sure of one thing – there will be no earthly way in which his subject is like the Third Reich.

"Since the rate-capping farce of 1985," explains Hosken, "when everyone was going to look like 'the biggest fucking liars since Goebbels', Livingstone was on record as believing that the 'international financial system kills more people than World War Two'; Britain's record in Ireland was 'as bad in 800 years as what Hitler did to the Jews in six'; most postwar physical education instructors were 'rehabilitated Nazi war criminals'; the press had treated him like 'a Nazi war criminal' when investigating his Local Action tax affairs; the government's voucher scheme for asylum seekers was 'like putting the yellow

star on Jews'; and the conservation quango English Heritage's opposition to his plans for skyscrapers was the 'biggest threat to the economy of London since Adolf Hitler'."

Well, not quite.

■ JONATHAN AITKEN'S words of comfort to fellow convict Conrad Black – "like me, he is a bruised pilgrim" (see Pseuds Corner, *Eye* 1206) – have a surprising resonance, delivered as they were as he expressed his desire to keep in touch with Black as he languishes in his US jail cell.

Thomas Harris's 1981 novel *Red Dragon* introduced Hannibal Lecter, imprisoned for multiple murders and cannibalism and engaged in correspondence with fellow serial killer Francis Dolarhyde, "the Tooth Fairy". The term by which Lecter addresses Dolaryhde? "Dear Pilgrim..."

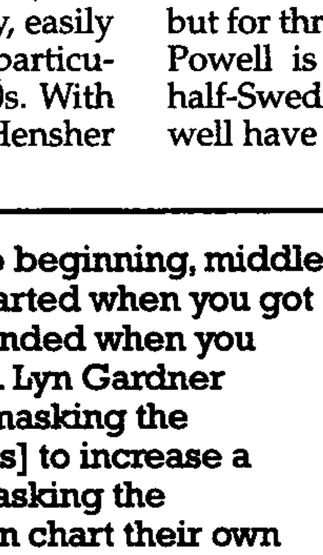
'Bookworm'

Pseuds Corner

Our performance has no beginning, middle or end – it could have started when you got off your train, and only ended when you checked out of the hotel. Lyn Gardner criticises our device of masking the audience [in white hoods] to increase a sense of distance. But masking the audience means they can chart their own introspective journey through the narrative.

FELIX MORTIMER, director of the theatre company nineteen;twentynine's staging of Blasted at the Queen's Hotel in Leeds, responds to a *Guardian* review.

How did you choose that hat? What did it mean to the movie?



Leading up to the first time we see that hat, his hats kind of echo or inform what's going on with his career and life. We start with a miner hat that is unshaped and unformed. By 1911, he had this hat. Daniel Day-Lewis felt that hats were very important to his character. There were three choices that were all good, and he took them and lived with them for days. He sort of creates mini-worlds, and so he took them, just took them for a spin, so to speak, and just settled on that one as what he felt most comfortable with and most represented in his mind the character he was creating. And it took on a kind of magic where he would be Daniel Day-Lewis, but you knew he was Daniel Plainview once the hat went on. So that was very rewarding to me.

And by the way, the sweat stains are real. It was worn day in and day out and has been much loved by all who've come into contact with it.

And it's great that it's become an iconic image of the film. It was a found item, from one of the local costume rental shops. The hat size, the height of the crown, the coloring, the quality of it, everything about it was right. Again I have to say that it took on a kind of magic, too, that we had it, that it was found. I love it when that happens.

Costume designer MARK BRIDGES discusses the hat worn by Daniel Day-Lewis in There Will Be Blood, *Washington Post*

In London I feel more confident. My son and I start the day in Paris dancing to rock 'n' roll music – we have top hats, and beads in our hair – but we put on our casual clothes to go out. In London we wouldn't change. When you're famous in France and wearing top hats at 9am, they don't like you. The French prefer you to be subtle. I love going to New York. No one cares there. I go to Starbucks in an enormous hat, dressed up as a boy, with a fake moustache. Everyone says: 'What a lovely moustache.'

French actress LOU DOILLON, *The Times*

Elsa Sime, one of the most prolific artists of our time, asks the timeless question 'What is Love?' by using goats as a metaphor to explore perceptions and ideas of love.

From the Cultural Programme brochure of the Alliance Ethio-Francaise, Addis Ababa

An Australian expat once told me she didn't consider she'd properly lived in a country until she'd sacked her first internet service provider.

JOHN LANCHESTER, *Guardian*

Saturdays for the *News of the World's* lawyer can be a bit like a forward patrol in Afghanistan's notorious Helmand province – plenty of incoming, occasional hand combat and a high risk of casualties.

TOM CRONE, legal manager for the *Sun* and the *News of the World*, *Guardian* Media Law special

CONTRIBUTORS: Steve Sneyd, Anon, Elaine Darkin, Neil Morris, Jonathan Austin, APR.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

SHAREHOLDER EXECUTIVE

Big cheques in the post

WHERE did the ruthlessly commercial approach to Britain's post offices, and with it the massive closure programme, come from?

The current policy originates in the government's Shareholder Executive, announced by Gordon Brown in 2002 with the task to "better fulfil [the government's] role as shareholder" of 25 publicly-owned companies like Royal Mail. Its target, on which the bosses' bonuses depended, was to increase the value of the six largest companies by £1bn by 2007.

Out went any notion that public corporations were also there to provide a public service. The men brought in for the job, first led by ex-CSFB investment banker Richard Gillingwater and now by former Deutsche Bank analyst Stephen Lovegrove, duly hit the target.

This was achieved largely by boosting the financial (if not service) results at Royal Mail following the installation of senior management, including chief executive Adam Crozier (pictured), on multi-million bonuses for boosting profits without penalty for service shortcomings. Unsurprisingly, under Crozier and Co, closures and redundancies have been the order of the day.

Not only do the Shareholder Executive bosses have a financial interest in slashing postal services, they are responsible for the advice ministers get on the Post Office generally, somewhat compromising the neutral, objective traditions of the civil service. Small wonder the result was a sweeping programme to close 2,500 post offices judged by the suits to be surplus to requirements.

When Commons public accounts committee chairman Edward Leigh MP asked the then Shareholder Executive boss Martin Bryant last year if he was therefore "responsible for trailing a blaze [sic] of destruction across my constituency", Bryant replied: "I could not possibly answer that, sir." A correct answer might have been a simple yes, though ultimate responsibility rests with the man who decided six years ago that the bankers should be brought in to put the squeeze on public companies.

PRESS FREEDOM

Murrer the merrier?

INSPECTOR KNACKER looks set to score a couple of hilarious own goals with his flat-footed determination to prosecute local paper reporter Sally Murrer (pictured) and her former partner and police contact, Mark Kearney.

The investigation has already sparked one embarrassing scandal over the dodgy prison bugging of human rights lawyer and Tooting MP Sadiq Khan, after Kearney, a former police intelligence officer, revealed that he had protested about being ordered to eavesdrop on the MP (*Eyes passim*).

More will be revealed when the couple, along with private detective Derek Webb, a former police officer, face trial in November on obscure common law charges of "gross misconduct in a public office" and "aiding and abetting gross misconduct" etc, etc..

Milton Keynes Citizen part-timer Murrer was arrested last May, strip-searched, and had her home and office raided by Thames Valley police, who believed that money was changing hands in return for sensitive police information. But even when it became clear that there was no corruption, and no issue of national security, Knacker blundered on, pursuing the trio merely for doing what all journalists and contacts do, i.e. discussing potential stories. Kearney met Murrer when he worked as a police press officer and was *paid* to talk to reporters.

The prosecution will, with supreme irony, put into the public domain embarrassing stories that were never revealed by Murrer or indeed anyone else. Such as Thames Valley police's cynical attempts to get officers to volunteer for extra shifts to search and stake out woods, as part of "Operation Overt", the investigation into an alleged plot to blow up trans-Atlantic airliners. Emails offering overtime to officers said they could earn enough to buy a week in Spain, a night at the Savoy, a plasma TV, and "the admiration of your children on Christmas morning". Another suggested "things to do in the woods" – such as taking a book to read, studying for their sergeants' or inspectors' exams, or "working out the compound interest" on their overtime. No wonder the operation ended up costing more than £22m.

Then there is the little matter of the murderer serving a life sentence, Sydney Draper, who made an audacious helicopter escape from Gartree prison, only to be recaptured and later sent to an open prison, from where – of course – he simply walked out.

Wouldn't Knacker's time be better spent pursuing such villains rather than Murrer & Co?

ACTIS SCANDAL

Poor show, Mr Alexander

INTERNATIONAL Development Secretary Douglas Alexander is determined to cover up the offshore shenanigans of Britain's publicly-owned development fund CDC, which invests in poorer countries supposedly to boost their economies.

Following the *Eye's* revelation that the fund screws these economies by diverting profits into tax havens (see issue 1205), Lib Dem shadow development secretary Michael Moore asked to see CDC's subsidiary companies' accounts to find out where the money was going.

Sorry, replied Alexander, all 79 of them are "not available" as they're filed (secretly) with authorities abroad. This is either rank financial mismanagement, as public companies should hold copies of all their subsidiaries' accounts, or, more likely, a lie to cover up how the rip off works.

A little can be gleaned from CDC's latest worldwide accounts, however. What should be more than £100m in tax payments to poor countries was all but wiped out by the "effect of overseas taxation" – accountancy jargon that describes the shifting of profits into tax havens at the expense of the developing countries where they're generated. Not something a development secretary committed to poverty relief would want scrutinised too closely.

Alexander did admit that CDC's largest investment, power company Globeleq, was set up in Bermuda after his predecessor Hilary Benn "was advised by the Department for International Development [DfID] and CDC's financial advisers that an onshore structure would not have attracted [other] investors". Which makes government policy on the matter astonishingly clear. If private investors insist on routing investment in poor countries through tax havens so they can whip the profits out without contributing any tax, so will the British government.

Presenting his budget three weeks ago, Chancellor Alistair Darling promised to "remain vigilant" against tax avoidance at all times. If he strolls round to DfID's offices, he'll find plenty of it there.

TAX AVOIDANCE

Dodgy dealing

AFTER three years blocking a freedom of information request from *Private Eye*, HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) has finally revealed how much it reckons is lost every year to the nation's tax dodgers.

When the information commissioner last year ordered HMRC to spill the beans, it immediately appealed; but faced with a tribunal last month, it capitulated on the courtroom steps. A week later, on budget day, out came the figures hidden in a mountain of other statistics.

The attempt to bury bad news – "managing information", admitted HMRC's press secretary – can be explained by the figures, prepared in 2005. Up to £42bn – even more than the government's budget deficit and enough to eradicate UK child poverty ten times over – could be going begging every year through tax evasion and (legal) avoidance, of which just £4bn is recovered by tax inspectors. There's also £12bn lost to VAT fiddles every year.

Yet with tens of billions left to chase, Gordon Brown's response was not to bolster the taxman's efforts – as he had once urged the Tories to do (see *Eye* 1205) – but to cut 25,000 jobs in the name of "efficiency".

The cuts are great news for some, notably the tax avoidance industry. And what an industry it is. Using a "detailed methodology", HMRC estimates that "50 percent of total [tax advice] fees are earned from avoidance", suggesting that the big four accountancy firms of KPMG, PwC, Ernst & Young and Deloitte – all renowned tax dodging experts – between them earn £1bn a year from tax dodging. (The same firms are simultaneously so popular in Whitehall Brown took their UK bosses on his trip to India and China to showcase the best of British business).

Unsurprisingly, HMRC calculates that legal tax avoidance alone, most of it by large companies employing the big beancounters' advice, costs up to £15bn a year. As it publicly persists with the fiction that few big businesses want to dodge their dues, no wonder it wanted to keep that quiet.

NUMBER CRUNCHING

£90,000 per month
Amount Northern Rock is paying new chief exec Ron Sandler to get it out of mess

£63,000 per month
Amount Northern Rock continues to pay former chief exec Adam Applegarth, who got it into mess

£2,000 per month
Average amount Northern Rock will no longer pay to each of the 2,000 staff being sacked to help it out of mess

NHS NEGLIGENCE

The life and slow death of Paul Steane

PAUL STEANE saved the NHS a fortune when he died of an overdose at the age of 45.

Had he lived he would have been in line for more than £1.5m in compensation for a series of hospital blunders which cost him his left leg, right foot and the power of speech.

While in Nuneaton's George Eliot hospital, in September 2000, the father of two had became dangerously dehydrated and was wrongly discharged home when his kidneys were in failure. Rushed back into intensive care with multiple organ failure, amazingly he pulled through. But the emergency life saving treatment caused his disabling injuries.

If that wasn't bad enough, the hospital – which has one of the highest mortality rates in the country – initially denied any responsibility for Paul's fate. Had it not been for a whistleblowing nurse, Paul and his wife Amanda may never have found out the truth. The nurse alerted them to the existence of crucial blood tests, taken on the very day he was sent home, which clearly indicated that his kidneys were failing. Those tests were either not looked at or not acted upon by hospital staff.

But in August 2003, three years after his near-fatal experience, Paul was found dead with an empty packet of painkillers by his bed. A note to his wife read: "My life has been hell since they did these things to me." A coroner recorded an open verdict. At the time the hospital trust was facing a potential claim of around £1.7m. With most of it consisting of the costs of his future nursing care, no longer needed, the hospital ended up settling with his widow for just £130,000.

Paul's battle was over, but his wife's was just beginning. Her representatives filed complaints to the General Medical Council, the Nursing and Midwifery Council and the Healthcare Commission. To this day no-one has been held to be at fault for his care, or lack of it. Nor for what happened in the weeks and months afterwards. Amanda maintains there was an attempted cover-up; a claim the hospital denies.

It does not, however, now deny that it failed Paul Steane, who had a complicated medical history. He suffered severe arthritis, treatment for which had triggered diabetes, high blood pressure, heart and circulation problems. In September 2000 he was admitted to the George Eliot for surgery to remove a gangrenous toe. But within 28 hours of being discharged with a note saying "good post op recovery", he was rushed back into intensive care where he lay in a coma for 10 days.

But the drugs given to keep him alive had reduced the flow of blood to his extremities, so his feet became gangrenous and had to be amputated. The sight in his left eye was also impaired by the cardiac arrests he had suffered. Later, he also suffered a rare complication caused by the life support ventilator he had been attached to. Scarring in his throat had caused the windpipe to close. He developed pneumonia and needed an emergency tracheotomy to breathe and suffered irreparable damage to his vocal cords.

In March 2001 Paul and Amanda attended a meeting with the hospital's then chief executive, Nick Carver, and the director of nursing, Jane Taylor. The Steanes said they believed the hospital was to blame for his kidney failure, and his subsequent disabilities, because staff had allowed his fluid intake to drop to such an extent that he had become dangerously dehydrated.

In a letter dated 12 April 2001, summarising the conclusions of the meeting, Mr Carver, denied responsibility. "At our meeting the medical staff involved did, however, refer to a pathology report undertaken on September 26 (the day before discharge) which they believe did not indicate Paul was in renal failure upon discharge. We therefore were of the view that whilst Paul's fluid balance had not been comprehensively completed… the latest chemical picture did not indicate that this had resulted in Paul's renal failure." There was no mention of the critical tests made on the 27th, that the whistleblower was later to reveal. The letter conceded only that "the maintenance of Paul's fluid balance record was below the standard that we would expect to see".

Without proof that he was seriously ill on discharge, that would probably have been as far as Mr and Mrs Steane could have gone with their complaint. But then the concerned nurse alerted them to the existence of the damning pathology report of the 27th. Blood tests showed that Paul's levels of creatinine (a waste product that should be cleared by the kidneys) had risen alarmingly from 127 to 200, well above normal – a clear indicator of kidney failure.

The hospital initially said the results must have been lost or misfiled, but the whistleblower alerted the couple to an internal memo, saying the file had been updated and put in chronological order on 22 March 2001 – a week before the meeting with the Steanes, when they were told there was no evidence of renal failure and only four days before an internal conference meeting about the case, involving hospital executives, medical staff and a lawyer. What's more, a second copy of the critical blood tests on the day of discharge had also been printed out on the 22nd.

The Steanes' MP, Mike O'Brien, alerted the police. But the fact that the blood test records existed didn't prove who saw them. The police dropped the investigation. The GMC concluded that because Mr Steane's copious medical notes were not in order, "extensive scrutiny" was required to find the crucial results. The GMC said there was no evidence that medical staff and executives went through the file in detail ahead of the meeting in March with the Steanes. While that might be the subject of criticism, it was not proof of a cover-up.

No one, however, seems to have bothered to find out who, other than the whistleblower, knew about or ordered the tests of the 27th. Neither did they address the issue of why, if a second copy of the results was printed ahead of the crucial meetings, it too became "lost" in the file.

The GMC said it could not examine Mrs Steane's complaint about the doctor who discharged her husband, because she had left it too late to complain – outside the five-year time-scale. But Mrs Steane had believed the hospital itself was investigating. (If it did, it is not revealing any details to Mrs Steane or, indeed, the *Eye*). The Health Service Commission has also declined Mrs Steane's request for a review of her complaint saying it falls outside its jurisdiction.

Amanda Steane, who has written a book, *Who Cares?* about Paul's ordeal, told the *Eye*: "I will fight on. What happened to Paul is unforgivable. He wasn't given enough to drink. He was sent home when he was seriously sick. His feet became rotten while he was in intensive care. The hospital initially denied it was at fault. No one has been held accountable for anything."

In a statement to the *Eye*, the hospital said: "The Trust admitted discharging Mr Steane at a time when blood tests showed his clinical condition was deteriorating. This case has been the subject of legal action and settlement was reached. The Trust apologises again for this error in Mr Steane's care. The Trust do not accept Mrs Steane's allegation of an initial cover-up of the truth. Investigations conducted separately by the police, General Medical Council and the Nursing and Midwifery Council into allegations relating to Mr Steane's blood tests found no basis upon which to take any action."

NI TRAINING

Engine trouble

AMONG the steaming piles left on the Stormont doorstep last May as Northern Ireland secretary Peter Hain departed for lesser things was a £5m a year contract with Carter and Carter, the training firm which collapsed last month, with administrators telling shareholders their shares were now worthless.

The contract for all motor mechanics' training in Northern Ireland was awarded by the direct rule regime last May, shortly before power was handed over to the Northern Ireland assembly.

Employment and Learning Minister Reg Empey (Ulster Unionist) announced last month that the contract had been cancelled, after an independent inspection "revealed a number of inadequacies in the delivery of the training". This left 150 young people with no idea whether their courses would be completed and nobody knowing how future training would be organised.

Carter and Carter won the contract under the Training for Success scheme, introduced to replace Jobskills last year. Jobskills itself was cancelled after Westminster's public accounts committee found an "astonishing catalogue of failures and control weaknesses" in 2005.

On 19 September 2007, two senior Stormont civil servants told the Department for Education and Learning scrutiny committee that Carter and Carter had taken over training of mechanics from 3 September, operating through Blackwater House training facility at Mallusk, Antrim, for Belfast and the east of the province, and through motor dealers Donnelly and Taggart for Derry and the north west.

But on 12 October Terence Donnelly, MD of Donnelly and Taggart, wrote to the committee denying this. "At no time has Donnelly and Taggart entered into an agreement for provision of [training] facilities nor, in fact, discussed the possibility…"

In fact when the contract was awarded, Carter and Carter had no training facilities in the North. It was only on 30 August, four days before the contract came on stream, that it acquired Blackwater, for £980,000. On 2 October, Carter and Carter suspended its shares, confessing it was unable to "accurately assess the financial position". This had been deteriorating even before the death of chief executive and founder Peter Carter in a helicopter crash (see *Eye* 1195).

Dooley Harte, of the Northern Ireland Public Sector Alliance, union said: "The public is entitled to know how the company was selected as sole provider in the North of training of mechanics, and how civil servants continued to stand by the company even when the alarm bells were ringing loud enough for a deaf man to hear."

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Wind fans

WHAT'S a power company to do when residents campaign against a new wind farm? Find some activists of its own of course.

Last year power company PM Renewables paid pro-wind power activists' expenses to travel from England to Berwickshire to attend public meetings and set up stalls in town centres encouraging people to sign letters to the council.

Irish windfarm company Airtricity went a step further last month, hiring Durham-based wind promotion consultant John Everett to drum up local support for its planned wind farm near Abbots Bromley in Staffordshire. Everett and his team have been gathering signatures for a pro-windfarm petition in Burton and Uttoxeter town centres

The professional campaigner is also behind a website supporting the turbines. The *Promoting Wind Energy* site's front page claims: "We are a group of local people from the village and elsewhere in East Staffordshire, who want to encourage like-minded people to speak up for this development." But the contact address given is Everett's and there are documents on the website left over from his pro-wind farm campaign in Sedgefield last year.

In the City

FUNDAMENTALLY Supine Authority insiders insist there was little interest in policing the booming "sub-prime" mortgage business which the FSA had taken over in 2004 until problems started to appear in 2006.

Then, last autumn, the FSA discovered that it had concerns about mis-selling by mortgage brokers and poor lending practices by the major providers. This followed a survey of the 11 lenders who controlled more than half the "sub-prime" market. Some of these had not been inspected by the FSA until 2007.

What the Bank of England describes as "other specialist lenders" – as distinct from banks, former building societies like Northern Wreck and the fuddy-duddy mutuals such as Nationwide they had left behind – saw their share of mortgage lending overtake that of building societies. Their market share doubled to around 15 percent in the 10 years to 2006. Much of that business was increasingly coming from "sub-prime" borrowers riding the housing bubble, plus "buy-to-let" investors. This is the home of the neutron loan – it removes the borrower but leaves the home standing and available for repossession and resale.

One of the biggest and fastest-growing players in the booming "sub-prime" market – along with GE Money Home Lending (*Eye* 1188) – has been GMAC-RFC, the UK subsidiary of the giant auto finance business originally built by Detroit carmakers General Motors. At the end of 2006, control of GMAC was bought by a consortium led by private equity group Cerberus, which was briefly interested in buying Northern Wreck last year.

GMAC, like GE and other American-owned lenders, introduced to Britain the aggressive – some prefer predatory – lending techniques that created the US sub-prime crisis whereby cities such as Cleveland and states such as California and Florida are seeing unprecedented waves of home repossessions among those who were only ever bad risks.

GMAC has seen its UK business accelerate in recent years, increasing its market share every year from 1999 to 2006 on the way to becoming the 10th biggest mortgage lender. In 2006 its loans grew by 75 percent to just over £12bn. Like Northern Wreck, GMAC relied on the money markets and securitising mortgages to fund this explosive growth. One of its big customers was Bradford & Bingley, which now has its own problems due to its appetite for "sub-prime" business and the wholesale money market.

GMAC's motto was "Mortgages for everyone in a fast, easy automated process". That process was designed in some cases to take just 25 minutes! All of which generated profits in 2006 of £110m – down on 2005 due in part to selling off chunks of the loan book.

Using a network of brokers highly incentivised by commission, GMAC is well represented among what are known as "medium to heavy adverse" customers – in other words, those who would find it difficult to borrow from High Street banks and building societies at the best of times, never mind now.

During 2006, the FSA carried out a wide-ranging "ARROW" risk-assessment inspection of GMAC. Unlike at Northern Wreck, with whom it found no problems, the FSA inspection of GMAC highlighted several matters which insiders say caused concern – in particular, insufficient verification of borrowers' incomes. The GMAC model relied more on credit scores and historic propensity to pay, plus a loan-to-value margin of 10-15 percent. Full status income verification was estimated to take place in less than 10 percent of all loans. Lenders have a duty to ensure affordability under FSA rules.

The inspection also discovered that, as with many similar US lenders such as leading US "sub-prime" pump feeder Countrywide Financial, customers were "cascaded down" to more expensive "sub-prime" terms, but they were rarely "cascaded up". As a result, GMAC borrowers who might have justified better, near prime terms were being offered, via their brokers, more expensive "sub-prime" loans. Such loans generate much bigger interest and fees for brokers and lenders.

A subsequent general market survey suggested that at least 5 percent of all "sub-prime" borrowers could be the victims of such treatment. This is clearly in breach of the FSA's "Treating Customers Fairly" policy.

Those with knowledge of the ARROW inspection at GMAC say there was discussion of its lending procedures, including the reliance on self-certification and whether the terms on offer were made clear enough to customers. GMAC insisted its credit controls were adequate and that it was not treating clients unfairly. The software used by brokers, it claimed, could only "cascade down"! It agreed to make this clear to brokers.

The FSA subsequently issued a risk mitigation programme (RMP) to GMAC – the norm where there are concerns. An RMP sets out the issues identified by the ARROW, the outcomes sought by the FSA, the action to be taken and the timescale for compliance. Some involved in the process believed that the FSA was too soft in its approach, given the evidence. The FSA accepted GMAC's assurances of improvements and took no further action. But all this was before "sub-prime" became a dirty word for financial regulators.

Subsequently, last year, two case studies justified the concern expressed by some inside the FSA. Carer Sandra Ashcroft was charged with obtaining money by deception by mis-stating her income on mortgage applications to GMAC and "sub-prime" rival Southern Pacific Mortgages, owned by Wall Street investment bankers Lehman Brothers. Ashcroft claimed to be a senior nurse with a good salary and was loaned £120,000 while earning only £6,000 a year. Evidence was given that she had been encouraged to provide misinformation by her mortgage advisers. Her counsel told Manchester crown court: "Very few questions are asked and the price is higher fees and higher interest rates." Ashcroft was given a suspended sentence last August because the judge found: "You appear to have been steered towards giving misleading information."

In January 2007, retired sailor Ismail Ali, 71, was made homeless when his east London ex-council flat was repossessed. He had obtained a £75,000 mortgage from GMAC in 2004, despite an income of only £517 a month. His mortgage cost £430 a month. It was claimed he earned £24,000 a year as a bookkeeper. Ali blamed his brokers for the misinformation.

"Sub-prime" lenders such as GMAC represent a greatly disproportionate share of repossessions, according to a 2007 study by Citizens Advice and other research. As the numbers of repossessions rise this year, that share is set to increase.

In both the Ashcroft and Ali cases, GMAC denied any complicity or wrongdoing, insisting it acted in good faith. A GMAC spokeswoman confirmed that the FSA had issued the RMP. "This is normal practice by the FSA following an Arrow visit and is nothing unique to GMAC," she said. "GMAC-RFC is not at liberty to disclose the contents of the RMP. Nothing contained in the RMP required material change in the way GMAC-RFC operates. All actions were implemented to the satisfaction of the FSA within the required time-frames."

But the evidence of the flaws in GMAC's approach to its customers' ability to repay has grown in recent months, especially in the US. Last November, the ultimate parent company, GMAC Financial Services, disclosed that it had lost $1.8bn at its home lending arm, Residential Capital, by the end of September. In February, GMAC disclosed that ResCap, which owns GMAC-RFC, had lost $4.35bn in 2007. The rating agencies have cut their rating on both GMAC and ResCap bonds to junk status.

In Britain, GMAC-RFC has cut staff, curbed its lending and is now looking for much higher loan-to-value margins. Mortgage applications are said to be down from 700 a day a year ago to sometimes just 10! It will be interesting to see whether the FSA response will be the same come the next ARROW visit.

CLEARLY FSA chief executive Hector Sants, like soon-to-be-gone retail markets division managing director Clive Briault, had no idea how little regulation there had been of Northern Wreck when quizzed by MPs on the Treasury select committee last October.

How else to explain Sants assuring sceptical MPs that the bank had been "under close and continuous supervision"? The FSA told the committee there had been "very regular dialogue with the firm on the full range of supervisory issues".

The FSA internal report summary last week revealed that there had been only eight meetings with the bank in total between February 2006 and August 2007, of which five were on one day in April 2007 and two were by telephone!

The report seeks to lay the blame firmly on the "manager and lead associate" supervisors in the major retail groups division who had been consistently involved with Northern Wreck from 2004. There were three heads of department in that period. But two key decisions in the failure to supervise Northern Wreck were taken much higher up the FSA food chain.

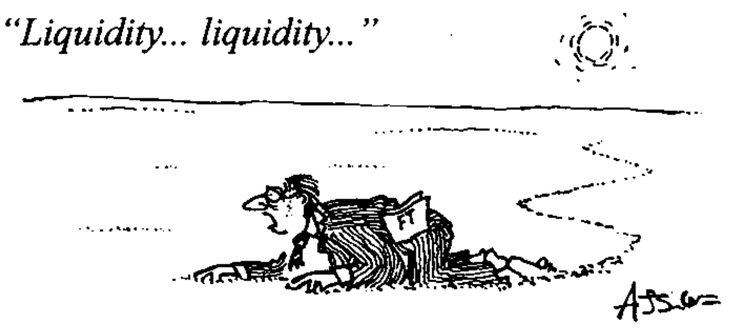
The damning FSA report – the full report seemingly needs a further month to be sanitised of names and supposedly sensitive commercial data before it is published – indicated that neither Briault nor David Strachan – head of major retail groups – showed sufficient if any interest in Northern Wreck despite its unique business model being so reliant on the wholesale money markets and general confidence.

The remarkable decisions in February 2006 to

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE & RIGG

"Liquidity... liquidity..."



allow Northern Wreck three years before it would be subjected to another ARROW inspection – against the advice of the manager and associate who carried out the inspection, who wanted only two years – and not to issue any risk mitigation programme because the bank was considered "low-probability" for risk were approved by an FSA internal ARROW panel. These usually consist of not just the two immediate supervisors and the head of department but also the relevant director – in this case Strachan – who is either present or consulted.

No wonder the internal report criticised the "level of engagement and oversight by supervisory line management" and failings "at the level of director and above". But it seems only Briault will walk the Canary Wharf plank. Strachan is still on board, even if it is suggested his role is now more directed to "financial stability" – a role he already had.

Luckily, all FSA executive directors are entitled to up to 12 months' "total remuneration" in the event of early termination. For Briault last year, that meant £408,000, including a £65,000 bonus. He also had a pension with a transfer value of £872,000 a year ago, which will probably be worth nearer £1m when he leaves later this month.

FSA insiders reject the internal report's alibi that Northern Wreck was a regulatory aberration. The regulatory failures exposed by its near collapse were, they say, "entirely representative – this is the culture of FSA supervision". Northern Wreck was clearly high-risk. But the "highly dysfunctional culture" within the FSA meant it escaped action until it was too late.

As for Sants' "close and continuous" monitoring, this was described as meaning "undue reliance" on and accepting information from the regulated. Supervision was seen as a dumping ground for poor managers with resulting poor motivation among supervisors who were either "inexperienced or time-servers".

Hopefully the MPs – who decided without the benefit of the FSA internal report that the regulator had "systematically failed" – will give Sants a harder time when he returns for a second grilling next month.

RICHARD WHO? That was the underwhelming reaction to news that the new man at the head of the Serious Farce Office will be Richard Alderman, the lawyer in charge of Revenue & Customs' civil investigations.

"Nobody has ever heard of him," declared one source in regular contact with the SFO. Alderman, 55, was clearly seen by the Attorney-General Baroness Scotland, herself no criminal law expert, as the proverbial "safe pair of hands" so beloved by Whitehall and Westminster. This may well have swung the decision in Alderman's favour against the other, more imaginative names on the short list, discussed in *Eye* 1203, which also included a QC and one or more top white-collar crime lawyers. As a civil servant, he was also more quickly available.

No doubt Alderman, who replaces Robert Wardle later this month, has signed up for the reforms expected to be required from the De Grazia report and can be relied upon if, after that, the SFO is to be rolled into the Serious Organised Crime Agency during his four-year tenure. A previous Alderman gig involved setting up the short-lived Asset Recovery Agency, which has since been subsumed into SOCA. But whether such a low-profile figure will be the man to deal with the kind of high-profile problems regularly faced by the SFO director – or the man to stand up to the government as Wardle did initially over BAE – remains to be seen.

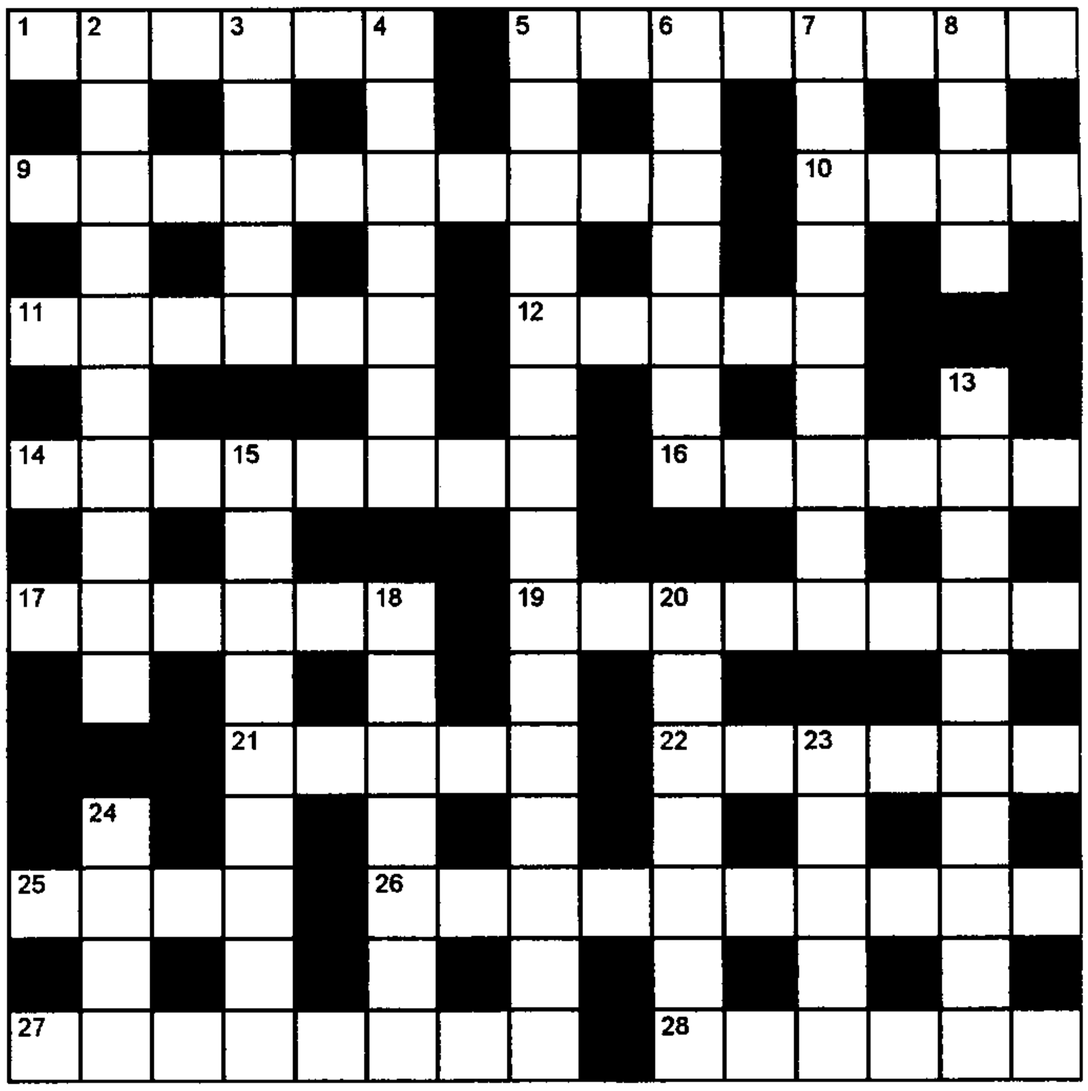
'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 362

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 11 April 2008

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

1 Say what would hold a big jug for securing one's breakfast? (6)
5 Certainly time to get fat rugby player's body back inside (2,2,4)
9 One sort of sex education person who's generous (6,4)
10 Duck getting leg over, look (4)
11 Bastards turning on the old lady – disgrace! (6)
12 Ready for it? Like the devil! (5)
14 New PM, real turd, ditching Right and Left as a figment of imagination (6-2)
16 Perform sexual act at the rear in Strand, with decorum (6)
17 Labour's origin: true spin, finding a place in Bush's heart (6)
19 Gut reactions of former Home Secretary bagging contract (8)
21 Thus could Anglia TV be taken to be a git (5)
22 "Member covered in piss" claim (6)
25 Starts to suck off actor knight in boozer (4)
26 About G-spot: it lies pointlessly somewhere behind the tongue (10)
27 Washed out truss donned for a formal occasion? (5,3)
28 Ejaculation that boosted an old sailor on the pull (2-2-2)

DOWN

2 Celebs refuse to be entertained by a git cavorting (10)
3 Hang on – clearing organ out (5)
4 Puff about to get on US beauty contest? (7)
5 Reportedly pull article on 'social' dose of cocaine to comply with political leader's decree? (3,3,5,4)
6 Naff spin user's nightmare? (3,4)
7 Plot involving *Sun* and Cameron & Co's way of doing things (9)
8 Regulation, markedly stiff length? (4)
13 "Poor sod in hell: Darling's end" is not quite the language of Shakespeare! (3,7)
15 This should interrupt the smooth ride of broadcast by Nick (3,6)
18 Leader of Senate has dead crude way – most blue (7)
20 It's a weakness of Cook, welcoming trouble (doorstepper at heart) (7)
23 Camilla just started into strip, bar entrance! (5)
24 Bollocks turn over – give it a rest! (4)

Crossword 361 winner: SHIRLEY WISE

ACROSS: 1 Offbeat 5 Odd fish 10 Blood money 11 Navy 12 Eminence 13 Reefer 14 Boss 16 Crumpet 18 Isthmus 21 Rows 23 Wallop 24 The Queen 26 Shoe 27 Check digit 28 Smuggle 29 Crunchy.

DOWN: 2 Full moon 4 Almanac 6 Day trip 7 Fan letter 8 Soviet 9/3 Knees Up Mother Brown 15 Spielberg 17 Sweetish 19 Topical 20 Speaker 22 Mayhem 25 Union.

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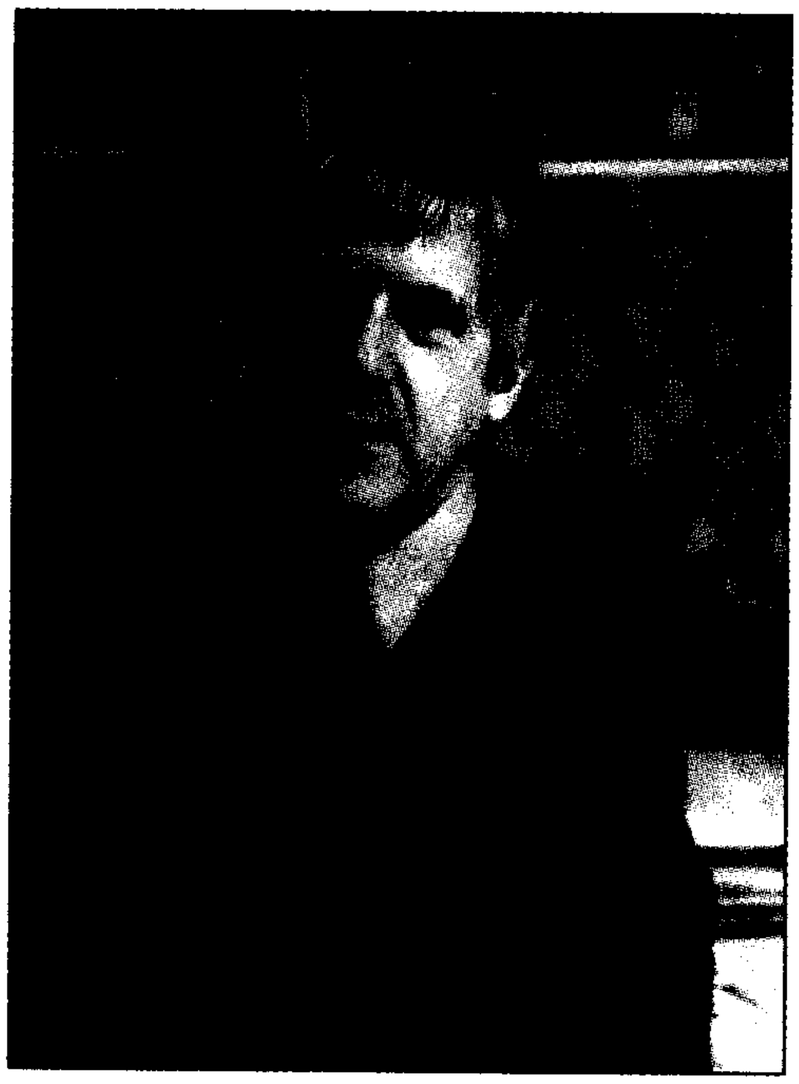

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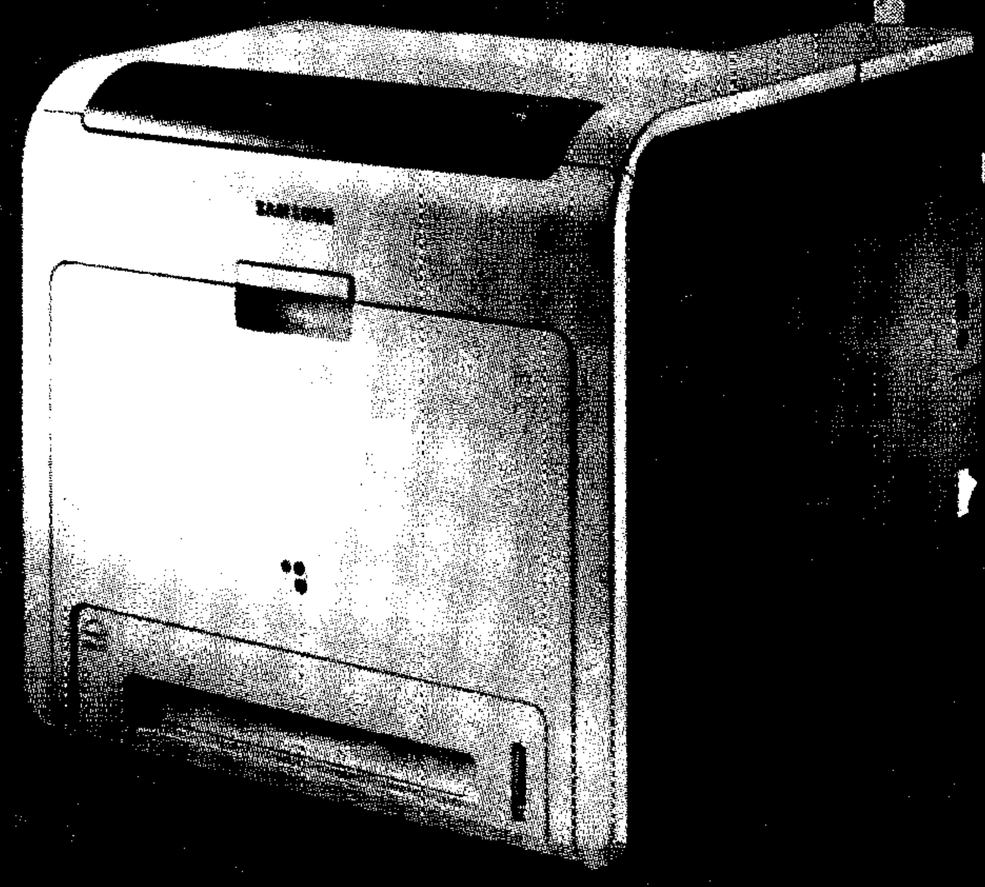

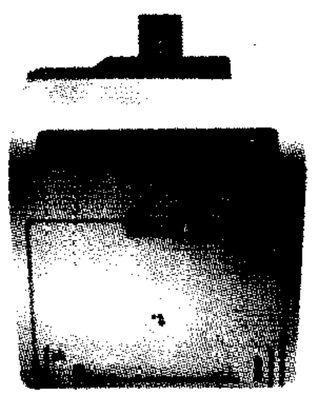

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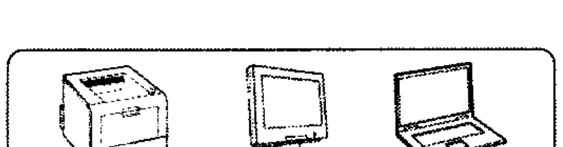

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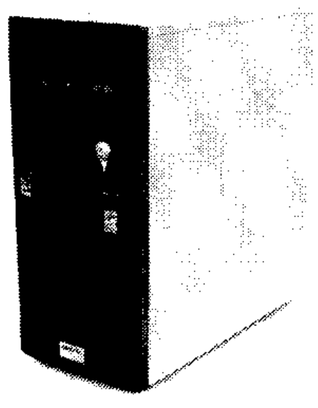

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- **Integrated sound and graphics, 6 x USB 2.0**
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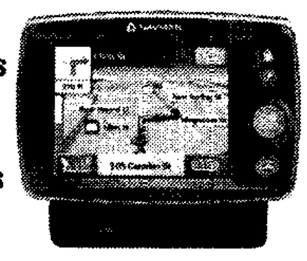

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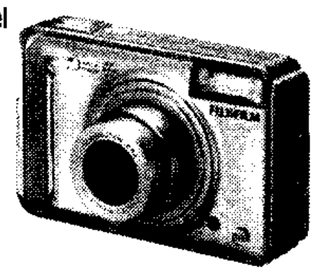

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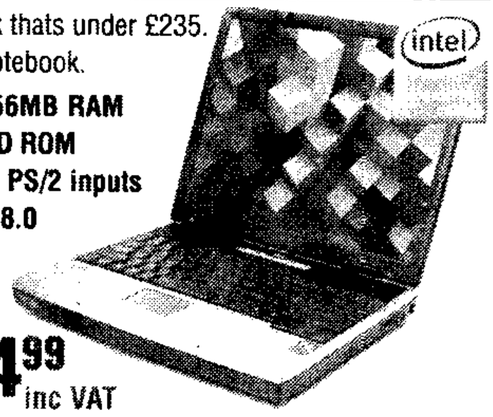

- **Intel Celeron M processor, 256MB RAM**
- **40GB hard disk and CDRW/DVD ROM**
- **USB, Serial, Parallel, VGA & PS/2 inputs**
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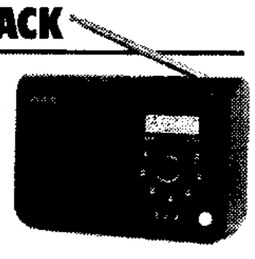

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- **20 presets, clock, kitchen & sleep timers**

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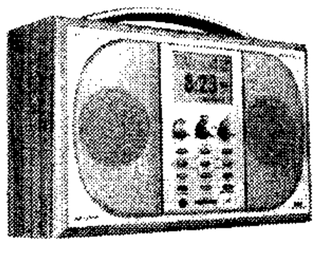

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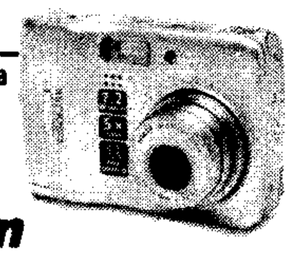

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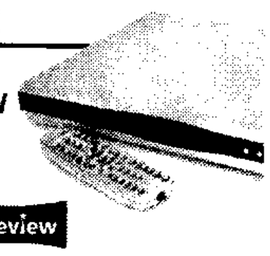

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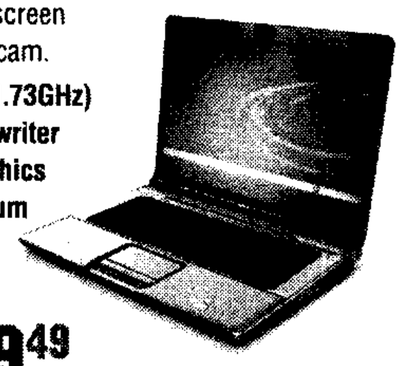

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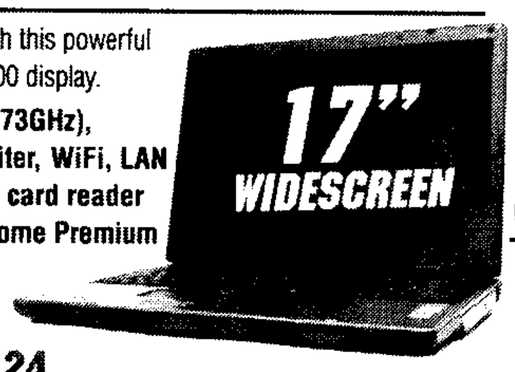

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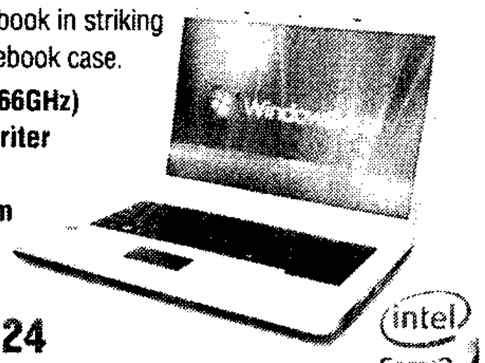

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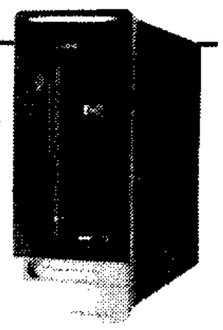

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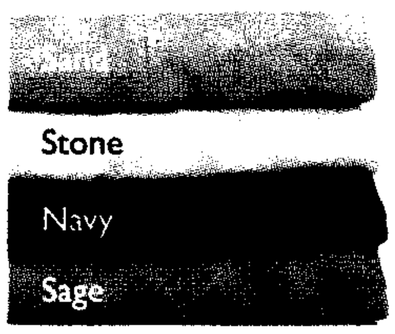

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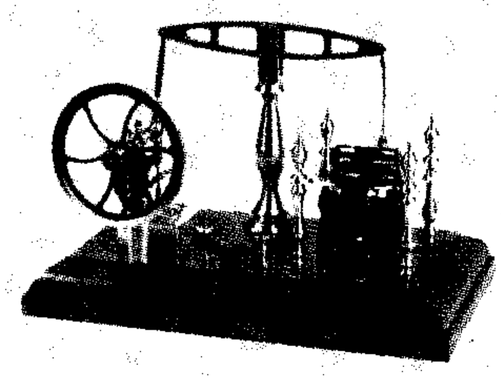

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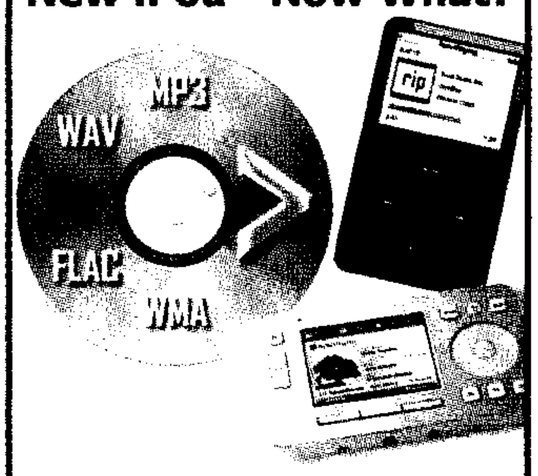

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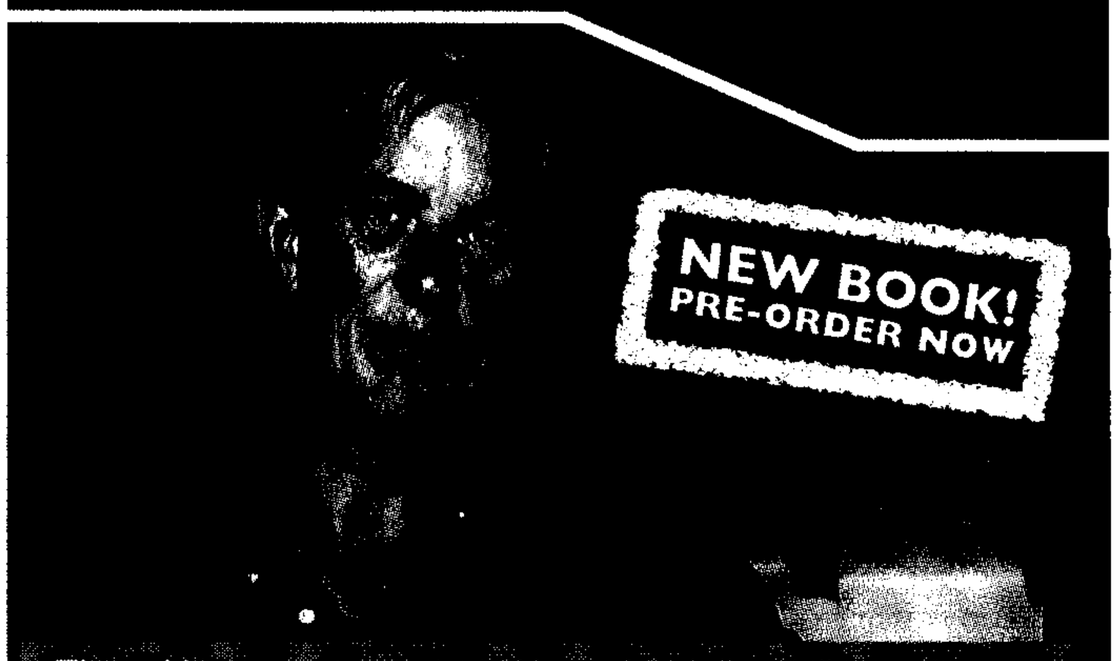

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